Walsall & Willenhall
CHRONICLE
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New rush hour services are a 'step in right direction'

DIRECT TRAINS TO CITY WELCOMED

BY DAVID COSGROVE

NEW direct Walsall to London train services in the rush hour have been welcomed as 'a step in the right direction'.

Walsall councillor Richard Worrall, who is chairman of the Transport Delivery Committee for the West Midlands Combined Authority, welcomed the announcement but hoped more trains could be put on during the day.

Councillor Worrall said: "We need – and hope for – better than that. Having services throughout the day to London would be something to shout about. Also there are questions about the end-to-end journey time.

"It's not always about the amount of trains, it's also how quickly they get us from Walsall to London, and vice versa.

"Some of the London Midlands trains can wander through the countryside via Northampton. If these new services stop at every station then that is less appealing. This is a step in the right direction but we're still hoping for more."

Awarded

Chiefs at the new regional rail franchise this week confirmed that people in Walsall will be able to take advantage of four direct rush-hour services to London from December next year.

West Midlands Trains Ltd – a joint venture between Dutch company Abellio, and Japanese duo East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co – has been awarded the rights to the West Midlands railway network from later this year. It will take over from London Midland.

Bosses at the new operator promised to invest £1 billion in the network, including new carriages and additional services to alleviate congestion on a variety of lines.

The news came as the busy Chase Line shut for two weeks with buses replacing trains between Walsall and Rugeley.

The Chase Line will be closed until August 28 for a £100 million upgrade. London Midland has put on a fleet of buses to replace the trains.

Walsall Council's Conservative group leader Mike Bird said he hoped disruption would be kept to a minimum. He said: "The Chase Line has required upgrading for many years so it needs to be done. It's like anything though – there's no gain without pain."

Bosses said the upgrade will include track improvements, platform work and the installation of stanchions and gantries ahead of overhead lines being installed next year.

A LITTLE PUPPY LOVE FROM FUNERAL DIRECTORS

Billie and Ben are helping to comfort customers at William Mitchell Funeral Directors when going through the funeral process

MEET BILLIE and Ben the four-legged friends who are helping to comfort heartbroken customers at a funeral directors.

The two caring canine brothers are on hand to offer a paw to hold for heartbroken families at William Mitchell Funeral Directors.

Cavapoo siblings Billie and Ben, both 12 months old, have been introduced at the branch in Aldridge to help put people at ease.

Those who visit the High Street directors are now offered the chance to sit with the loveable dogs before making any funeral arrangements in a bid from staff to lower the heart rate and stress levels of customers at a difficult time.

The idea of 'bereavement dogs' is popular in America but now William Mitchell are hoping to inspire others to follow suit after seeing first hand just how helpful this time can be.

Owner Donna Ryan, who runs William Mitchell Funeral Directors, said: "I had brought my dogs in to work one afternoon after they had been out to have their hair cut and get some treatments.

"A lady came in who was distraught, as so many of our customers are for obvious reasons. She was in floods of tears and really struggling, but she asked if she could just have five minutes with Billie and Ben alone.

"She just sat there with them and it really helped to calm her down."

Ms Ryan said: "We decided that next time somebody was really struggling, we would ask them if they wanted to spend some time with the dogs and see what happened, whether it had the same effect as the first time."

It did and now the dogs are members of staff, offering up their help three days a week to anyone who needs it.

HEALTH

Views sought on stroke services

PROPOSALS to move stroke services from Walsall Manor Hospital to Wolverhampton have gone out for consultation.

Bosses at the Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs the Manor, said earlier this year that hyper-acute stroke services at the site were 'unsustainable' and recommended that the service should be transferred to New Cross Hospital.

Walsall Manor Hospital currently cares for 360-400 patients per year, which is not enough to meet the minimum requirement of 600 stroke patients a year.

Walsall CCG says that initial research pointed to residents not wanting the services to be moved. To take part in the consultation, visit www.walsallccg.nhs.uk

POLICE

Classic bike parked at chippie is stolen

A CLASSIC motorcycle was stolen after its owner parked up outside a fish and chip shop, on Saturday evening.

Police area appealing for anyone who may have seen the incident – between 9.15 and 9.35pm – where a 1965-reg black Royal Enfield Bullet motorcycle was taken from outside Cod's Plaice in Wood Lane, Willenhall.

Police say the bike is 'unusualy and distinctive and have called for anyone with information to call 101.

DOCTORS

GP proposals set to affect 30,000

RESIDENTS are urged to have their say on plans to revamp Walsall's GP services which will affect more than 30,000 patients.

Two doctor's surgeries face closure and a further six would merge under radical plans. The proposals from Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group also include scrapping weekend and out-of-hours appointments for five surgeries.

● Full story - Page 5

INSIDE

GROWING TREND FOR SUCCESS

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CONTACT US

EDITORIAL:
Tel: 01543 465305
E-mail: walsall.chronicles@expressandstar.co.uk

SPORTS:
Tel: 01902 319453
E-mail: chron.sport@expressandstar.co.uk

PHOTOGRAPHIC: Tel: 01902 319430
E-mail: picturedesk@expressandstar.co.uk

ADVERTISING: Sarah Jones
Tel: 01543 465341
E-mail: sarah.winfield-jones@expressandstar.co.uk

PROPERTY: Marguerita Finnegan
Tel: 01902 319627
E-mail: marguerita.finnegan@expressandstar.co.uk

MOTORING: Stuart Whitehead
Tel: 01902 319177
E-mail: stuart.whitehead@expressandstar.co.uk

CLASSIFIED:
Tel: 01902 317878
E-mail: my-classified@expressandstar.co.uk

DISTRIBUTION: Paul Jones
Tel: 01902 319990
E-mail: p.jones@expressandstar.co.uk

Walsall & Willenhall
CHRONICLE
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£1.2m drugs ring gang locked up

Matthew Falconer

SIX members of a drugs ring have been jailed for a combined 28 years for supplying up to £1.2 million of cocaine.

Detectives were alerted to the gang when the ring leader collapsed from an overdose at a Staffordshire hotel.

Among the gang was Matthew Falconer of Walsall Wood who was the 'warehouseman' for the drugs. The men were sentenced at Stafford Crown Court after earlier pleading guilty to conspiracy to supply Class A drugs.

Prosecutors alleged the group supplied between £750,000 and £1.2m worth of cocaine in South Staffordshire between 2014 and 2016.

Staffordshire Police launched a probe after Scott Jenkinson collapsed from a cocaine overdose in the hotel foyer in Rugeley on November 1, 2015.

A search of Jenkinson's rucksack and personal property uncovered cocaine 'prepared and bagged ready for street dealing'with a total value of £12,000.

Within hours police discovered James Colbourne had also been with Jenkinson at the hotel – acting as his assistant. Jenkinson was described as having the leading role in the conspiracy with Robert Kennedy, James Vincent and Nathan Blake as street dealers. Falconer was described as a warehouseman paid to store drugs for the group.

Jenkinson, aged 32, of Brindley Crescent, Hednesford, was jailed for seven years; Kennedy, 36, of Boney Hay Road, Burntwood, Vincent, 30, of no fixed address, Blake, 31, of Kingsdown Road, Burntwood, and Falconer, 40 of Salters Road, were all jailed for four years and six months. Colbourne, 29, of Mount Street, Hednesford, got three years.

Elderly fall patient, 85, given wrong name tag

AN elderly woman was discovered in Walsall Manor Hospital by her family with a wrong name tag on her wrist.

Sheila Baker, aged 85, was first admitted following a fall which occured at her daughter Fiona Joyce's home.

Sheila Baker

But a week after a half-hip replacement, the family were shocked to find her with a wrist tag with the wrong name.

The name belonged to a patient located opposite in the hospital's orthopaedic ward. Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, which runs the hospital, has said it is investigating the incident, which was reported to the trust's patient advice and liaison services by the family.

Mrs Baker, who was in poor health before the fall, has since been placed on end-of-life care. Miss Joyce, 54, said: "I'm absolutely devastated."

Miss Joyce visited her mother last Friday – two days before she was discovered with the wrong name tag on her wrist by other daughter Amanda Abakay.

She said: "We don't know exactly how long the wrong tag was on her wrist or if she was given any medication which was not for her. When we asked what happened, we were told it was agency nurses."

Mrs Baker was living in Rushall independently before she was admitted to hospital. Born in Walsall, she attended St Patrick's School in the town before working at factory and hotels across the country. She married twice and had seven children, one boy and six girls. She also has 19 grandchildren. Rachel Overfield, director of nursing at Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust, said: "We can confirm that no harm has been caused to the patient."

Sally's dismay at destroyed bench

The bench in Bloxwich Park after vandals destroyed it

Sally Cooper with the bench in 2014

CANCER survivor Sally Cooper is devastated after vandals destroyed a bench that was dedicated to her and 'got her through hard times'.

Sally, of Walsall, was eight years in remission from cervical cancer in 2014 when Cancer Research UK placed a bench in her honour at her favourite spot in Bloxwich Park.

Last week, the bench was severely damaged with only the back and left side of it still standing. The bench, which reads 'Sally Cooper loved sitting here...and still does thanks to everyone who Stands Up To Cancer', represents a difficult time in her life recovering from the disease. It was also at a time when her son Martin and mother Kathleen Vernon were diagnosed with cancer. Her mother died from the disease in 2010.

Sally, who is in her 50s, said: "When life seemed unfair, particularly during my treatment, I went there to walk the dog and look at the flowers. It gave me hope and it was a great way of showing people can survive cancer. I am very upset that the bench has been vandalised to the point it can no longer be used." It was placed there as one of a series of benches being put around the country as part of Cancer Research UK's Stand Up To Cancer Campaign.

Helen Johnstone, a spokesperson for the charity, said: "We are deeply saddened to hear about this act of vandalism on a bench which obviously had such special meaning to Sally and her family."

Mark Holden, head of Clean and Green, said: "I'm appalled to see that a special bench in Bloxwich Park has been so badly vandalised." Anyone with information has been urged to call police on 101.

Legion in £2,000 bill for parade to go ahead

MORE than £2,200 must be stumped up by Royal British Legion volunteers for a remembrance parade to go ahead after the council withdrew funding.

Members of the Bloxwich branch are tasked with raising £2,238 to ensure the event takes place in November. It is the first time the branch has had to pay to cover the policing of road closures.

Walsall Council and the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner will now contribute just 30 per cent of the overall cost.

Branch co-ordinator Elizabeth Barnes said she was confident the cash would be raised, mainly through events such as tea parties. But she added: "I want to make the public aware that we are having to raise this money ourselves for the event to go ahead.

"It just feels that all the council wants is one parade in Walsall and centralised events at other places.

"The officers don't realise we have memorials around our patch."

Last year West Midlands Police said it would no longer be providing officers for traffic management duties.

However in December, Walsall Council's cabinet agreed to provide 30 per cent of traffic management costs for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Step up to join ramblers' walk

THE Walsall Group of the Ramblers will be heading to Ufton Fields Nature Reserve, near Southam (Warwickshire) for a 7.5 mile circular walk on Sunday August 20.

'Ufton, Harbury and Southam' is a fairly level walk mostly on good paths in Warwickshire's Blue Lias country.

Non-members are always welcome and can obtain more information from the walk leader on 01922 692929.

More information about the Walsall Group is available on the website www.walsallramblers.org.uk and the group are on Facebook.

Black history book of town launched

A SECOND book by Walsall African Caribbean Black History Project has been launched.

'Through Sweat, Tears and Triumphs' shares the powerful and personal experiences of African Caribbean people who came to settle in Walsall in the 1950s and 1960s. The book follows on from the first work 'Through Sweat and Tears – The Caribbean Presence in Walsall'.

It is available to buy via Amazon for £9.99.

Drugs found behind bath panel in flat after tip-off

A DRUG dealer has been jailed after police found cocaine and heroin hidden behind a bath panel at one of his flats – following a tip-off. Officers managed to identify Alex Burbury from fingerprints left on drugs packaging following a raid on the home in Upper Ride, Coventry, where an imitation gun was also seized.

A warrant was then executed at another property in Yarningdale Road, Willenhall, where Burbury was found with £1,150 in cash. Trena Hutchinson, who was a tenant of the flat, was also discovered to be hiding heroin and crack cocaine within her clothing after the raid in September 2015.

Examination of mobile phones meant officers were able to link Burbury, of Birmingham Road, Ansley Village, Warwickshire, to drug dealing. The 24-year-old was charged with two offences each of possessing crack cocaine and heroin with intent to supply and also having cannabis.

He was convicted of the offences following a trial and was jailed for five years at Coventry Crown Court.

Hutchinson, 35, of Yarningdale Road, Willenhall was also convicted of possessing heroin and crack cocaine with intent to supply and will be sentenced on September 15. Officers have praised the public for passing on information to the local neighbourhood team which led to the raids and arrests.

Call for vigilance on vehicle crime

PEOPLE have been reminded to stay on their guard to prevent vehicle crime in Walsall.

Kevin Pitt, of West Midlands Police, has spoken about how residents can do their part to prevent criminals from damaging or stealing their car.

He said: "To reduce your chances of becoming a victim, ensure that you remove all personal belongings, even those of little value, every time you leave your vehicle.

"Items on show inside a car can tempt thieves to try their luck.

"A general thing you can do is to take care where you park your vehicle.

"Choose somewhere light, under a street or security light, for example.

If you have a garage, use it. Finally, be vigilant."

Fun run for heroes

A TWO-MILE fun run is being held in a West Bromwich park later this month. The event in aid of Help for Heroes starts at Farley Park Lodge on August 30 at 11am. People can call 0121 318 1166 in advance to register.

No fall in drink-drive crash injuries

Aftermath of a crash in Tividale in which a woman was fined for drink driving

THE number of people injured in car crashes caused by drunk drivers across the Black Country has failed to drop in the last four years, latest figures show. Since 2013 the annual number of casualties has remained in the 90s – or one every four days – with a spike in 2015 when those hurt in drink-driving accidents hit 121.

The figures include drivers, passengers and pedestrians who were either killed or injured in drink-drive collisions. Some 60 per cent of casualties are people other than the driver.

They follow statistics showing that the West Midlands saw the second highest number of arrests in the country for drink drivers involved in serious accidents. West Midlands Police say they have maintained a sharp focus on clamping down on drink driving in recent years, despite the number of traffic officers on the region's roads halving in the past decade.

Wolverhampton saw the highest total with 104 casualties between 2013 - 2016 although, on a positive note, the number fell dramatically from a high in 2015 of 32 to just 14 last year. Last year also saw a similarly sharp fall in Walsall with deaths and injuries dropping from 30 in 2015 to 15 last year.

In Sandwell, too, the number or those injured or killed shot up from 18 in 2014 to 30 last year. Brake, the road safety charity, has joined others in calling for the drink-drive limit to be lowered.

Around three-quarters of 2,000 people questioned in a survey last year were in support of a lowering of the limit to 50mg alcohol/100ml blood. The current limit of 80mg alcohol /100ml blood was set back in 1965.

Hospital chiefs warned over 'bullying culture'

HOSPITAL chiefs were threatened with enforcement action by the health regulator over staffing levels and a bullying culture within a maternity service, it has emerged.

Troubled Walsall Healthcare Trust, which runs the Manor Hospital, was given the warning in June by the Care Quality Commission, board papers reveal.

It is a further blow for the trust which was placed in special measures in January last year for a 'heavy-handed' approach, described as bordering on bullying, by senior management.

The trust papers say: "Since the last board meeting we have received a warning of potential enforcement action from the CQC with regards to their concerns about staffing and culture in maternity."

They add that the threat of action has been withdrawn after the trust submitted an improvement plan which included asking both the Royal College of Obstetricians and the Royal College of Midwives to carry out independent reviews of the service.

Standards

David Drew, a former clinical director at the Manor who was sacked after raising concerns over standards of care and later wrote a book describing the trust's 'bullying culture' and the effect of staffing cuts, tweeted: 'Bullying still alive and well I see.'

The regulator told trust bosses 18 months ago it had received comments from whistleblowers about behaviour by senior management that 'alluded to a bullying culture', particularly in the midwifery department. They included claims that patient safety was compromised in the hospital's maternity ward, where concerns were raised over 'multiple issues with staffing, delivery of care and treatment'.

In June last year, a review by the Royal College of Paediatrics highlighted concerns over staff shortages in the neonatal unit. The midwifery-led unit at the Manor is currently shut for up to eight weeks due to staff shortages, with expectant mothers instead being transferred to the hospital's main delivery suite.

Brave Jill's ashes scattered in sea

Jill Saward's sister Sue Lancaster holding her ashes with Mr Drake and sons Fergus, Myles, and Rory

Mr Drake with his wife's ashes which he scattered

RAPE campaigner Jill Saward's husband scattered her ashes in the sea in a final farewell. Vicar's daughter Ms Saward, who died in January after suffering a stroke aged 51, had her ashes cast out to sea off the coast of Nefyn, in north-west Wales on Saturday.

A memorial was held at Saint David's Church to pay tribute to her 'life, work and ministry' – before her husband, pitch-side announcer at Saddlers, Gavin Drake released her ashes.

Ms Saward, from Hednesford, was the first rape victim to waive her right to anonymity to speak about a sexual assault after being attacked at her home in 1986 while her father and boyfriend were tied up. She chose Nefyn as her final resting place because of a long-running connection with the town which began in her late teens.

Ms Saward first visited Nefyn as part of the long-running annual beach mission, which she first served as part of the team when she was 18 in 1983.

After a decade on the mission, she stepped down from the team but continued to take her annual holidays in the town during the mission fortnight. Her eldest son, Myles, is now a member of the beach mission team.

Mr Drake said his wife never got over the horrific rape which led to her fighting for victims' rights. He said: "It was always there, it was always something in the background. She lived a full life, a life full of joy, a healthy life. She never fully got over it. So much change has been brought about by Jill's work, but the way victims are treated is still appalling."

NEWS IN BRIEF

School aims to bridge work gap

PLANS for a 'badly needed' two-storey building to help pupils find work have been submitted by Walsall Academy.

The secondary school, which has more than 1,000 children, wants to create the employability hub at its Lichfield Road site in Bloxwich. Chiefs say hundreds of its pupils are being trained externally but now the school needed its own on-site facility.

One of the submitted documents states: "External facilities have been used to deliver this training but increasing numbers mean this is no longer practical and on-site facilities are badly needed."

Key thieves steal car outside home

A CAR has been stolen off a driveway after thieves broke into a home and snatched the keys.

West Midlands Police is appealing for information about the incident, which took place on Delves Green Road, some time between 11pm on Tuesday and 6am on Wednesday.

Kevin Pitt from Walsall Police said: "The offenders have got into the back garden and then snapped the lock in a UPVC patio door to enter the house.

"They have located and stolen a handbag which contained car keys."

Anyone with information call 101.

Amazon pays 50pc lower on tax bill

AMAZON saw a 50 per cent fall in the UK corporation tax it paid last year and at the same time that saw a 54 per cent increase in turnover.

Accounts filed by Amazon UK Services show the company was billed £15.8 million in 2015 compared with £7.4m in 2016. In the same period, turnover at Amazon UK Services broke the £1 billion barrier for the first time, climbing from £946m to £1.46 bn, while profit before tax fell from £48.5m to £24.2m.

Amazon has a huge distribution warehouse at Rugeley.

Delays on town route as maintenance starts

MOTORISTS are being warned about delays in place on a main route in West Bromwich town centre up until August 21.

Bull Street, which runs from Sandwell College to New Square Shopping Centre, will see workers on behalf of the Richmond Group carry out essential maintenance on the stretch of road.

The one way system will be in place for 24 hours everyday.

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COUNTY NEWS

Volunteers praised for flowers' return

VOLUNTEER workers in the Sandwell Valley have been praised for helping introduce wildflower meadows into the beauty spot. The volunteers have worked alongside Sandwell Council staff to introduce native meadow plants into areas in the nature reserve.

Chiefs said the meadows will 'ensure that the meadow plants can grow in the specially-selected areas around the Valley area'. Councillor Richard Marshall, cabinet member for leisure, said: "The volunteers have done great work on traditional hay meadow management in the Valley fields to create some very colourful areas."

Putting students on right course

THE University of Wolverhampton has launched a 'Start Here' advertising campaign to highlight its courses on offer, featuring billboard adverts across the Black Country and the wider West Midlands.

The new clearing website pages give detailed information about what courses are available and how students can apply when they receive their results.

Katharine Clough, director of external relations, said: "Reasons for going through clearing may vary, but the end goal will be the same – to get that all-important place on a course. Visit www.wlv.ac.uk

Course weighs in with leading title

A RACECOURSE has been named as the Best Small Racecourse in the Midlands by The Racegoers Club.

Wolverhampton Racecourse has won the accolade. Jan Denning, commercial sales director, said: "We are delighted to have been awarded the prestigious title. The award itself serves as testament to all the hard work carried out and dedication of our staff. We look forward to hosting their annual exhibition next month on the September 28."

Inaugural vegan event due for town

A BLACK Country town will welcome its first ever vegan health and lifestyle event. The Crown Centre in Stourbridge will be packed with more than 40 stalls selling vegan food, goodies and lifestyle products on August 19, from 10.30am to 4pm.

There will be talks and films from leading vegan organisations. Admission is £1 with proceeds going to the Hillfields Animal Sanctuary.

Runners urged to join in with Joel run

RUNNERS are being urged to join a fun run in Sandwell Valley to raise money for the charity set-up in memory of Joel Richards and his uncle and grandfather who died in the Tunisia terror attack.

They are being encouraged to join the run the RunForJoel event at Sandwell Valley Country Park, West Bromwich, on Sunday September 10 for the SmileForJoel charity set up by Joel's mother Suzanne Evans of Wednesbury.

Joel – together with his uncle Adrian (a 49-year-old Sandwell Council manager) and grandfather Pat Evans – were killed in the tragic shootings in June 2015. Joel's younger brother, then aged 16, survived the atrocity.

Runners can choose between a competitive 5k run or a 3k fun run to help raise money for SmileForJoel in this popular community event open to individuals, families and friends of all ages and abilities across the region.

Suzanne said: "Last year was a fantastic event and won the Black Country Event of the Year competition and raised an amazing £27,000. I am hoping that this year's run, which is supported by Sandwell Leisure Trust and Sandwell Council, will be just as successful. The SmileForJoel charity raises money for Victim Support which supports all UK families who become victims of murder and terrorism, something which happens far too often as recent events in London and Manchester show only too well."

She urged runners to obtain sponsor forms or use the special page links to raise money at the www.smileforjoel.com website.

Holiday family watch in horror as home raided

A FAMILY watched, helplessly, while a burglar broke into their home more than 120 miles away on holiday. Donna and Nathan Marusamy, of Streetly, Walsall, were on holiday in Burnham-On-Sea, Somerset, with their children when the offender broke into their home in Laneside Avenue.

The couple were in their hotel when Mrs Marusamy, aged 37, received a notification on her phone that sensors at the family home had detected movement in the back garden. Her and her husband then watched on in horror as they saw a burglar walk into their living room.

Footage showed the burglar creep around the back garden, enter the house with a torch and roam around looking for things to steal.

The couple called the police but it was Mrs Marusamy's brother-in-law who was first on the scene, causing the thief to flee when he shone a light into the house.

Wedding rings belonging to Mr Marusamy, 45, and his father were taken along with an Air-King Rolex watch, Indian gold jewellery and passports in the break-in, which occurred around 10.15pm last Friday.

Footage of the offender in the family's home

Conservatory

Mrs Marusamy, a headteacher in Walsall, cut the family trip short after the break-in. She said: "I wish to God I hadn't seen it unfold, it really ruined our weekend break.

"We thought it's either a ghost or someone is in our garden. We zoomed in and I said 'I think it is someone checking out our house'. He got in through our conservatory and removed the glass and put it to the side neatly. He then stepped inside, I was horrified, scared and helpless.

"My brother-in-law went on the driveway and shone a light through the house and the burglar then legged it. I thought I am splattering your face everywhere so I uploaded it to Facebook."

The post has since been taken down by Mrs Marusamy, who said as a result of the incident her children now sleep in the same bed as her.

West Midlands Police is investigating the burglary and is asking anyone with any information to come forward. Kevin Pitt, police, engagement and consultation officer for the force, said: "The offender has gained entry to the rear garden and then removed the beading from a window to enter the house."

A spokeswoman for West Midlands Police added: "Police are currently investigating a burglary at an address on Laneside Avenue, Streetly, on Friday, August 4.

"Police were alerted to the break-in just after 10.30pm. Upon arrival the suspect had fled the scene. Enquires are on-going to trace both the burglar, and the stolen items."

Wonderful watercolours

Barbara Nicholls with her work which is on display at the New Art Gallery

A NEW exhibition of 'monumental' watercolour works has gone on display. Barbara Nicholls' display Sedimentary Flow at Walsall New Art Gallery is now available for the public to view until November 19.

Her work involves manipulating the behaviour of colour pigments in different quantities of water. Through this she paints pictures of collective memories of natural spaces, landscapes and of the body. Barbara, from London, said: "When I create my watercolours on paper I recall places I have experienced and others I imagine as the work forms. Some seen and others sensed.

"I remember ancient meandering pathways; natural and man-made dams and bridges across rivers; the controlled carrying of water in aqueducts and canals; flooded fields with lines of debris left behind after the water has retreated; tide marks on beaches; cumulus clouds over hills reflected in ponds..."

Martin Holman, who writes about modern and contemporary visual art, has written the words for a 128-page catalogue of Barbara's work.

He said: "Nicholls has followed the idiosyncrasies in the behaviour of her materials and has orchestrated them into resonant shapes that, while never declaring themselves in any specific identity, nonetheless touch collective memories of the experience of natural spaces, of the landscape. In that way, she formulates a new reality."

Libraries 'could have been saved' says leader

LIBRARIES in Walsall could have been saved if the cash-strapped council had bought a £12.5 million shopping centre sooner, the authority's boss has claimed.

Councillor Sean Coughlan, the Labour leader of Walsall Council, has claimed if the Saddlers Shopping Centre was bought three years ago under the previous Conservative administration then some of the nine libraries shut this year under desperate cost-cutting measures could have stayed open.

His comments came as he defended his administration's decision to spend £13.8m on the centre, describing the move as 'very positive for Walsall'. He also added the centre would bring 'significant income back to the council', believed to be a profit of around £800,000 a year.

He said: "If the previous administration had done this three years ago we would have been able to keep libraries open because the money will be used to keep vital services in Walsall open rather having them cut by the Government."

He added in a separate statement: "As the impact of the Government's austerity measures is felt more deeply, we will have to be creative and innovative in order to still be able to provide services that are not statutory services.."

But Councillor Mike Bird, the Conservative leader of the council three years ago, said: "If the centre is going to be worth £10m more in five years time as the council say then why is Topland selling it?"

Reports on drugs and vice made

HALF a dozen reports about drugs and prostitution on a notoriously crime-ridden road, have been made to police in two months. West Midlands Police confirmed it has received six complaints since mid-June in relation to Wednesbury Road in Caldmore.

Residents in the area are said to be at the end of their tether with ongoing issues and are in the process of arranging a public meeting.

It comes after residents living in Farrington House, on Wednesbury Road, claimed their block of flats was blighted by prostitution and drugs.

The police said these latest reports were not directly concerned with that property but the nearby vicinity. A force spokesman said: "The neighbourhood team are aware and have spoken to a couple of the callers."

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Child arrests for county plummet by 64 per cent

CHILD arrests across Staffordshire and the West Midlands have dropped by more than 60 per cent, latest figures show.

The number of children arrested by West Midlands Police has decreased by 64 per cent in the last six years, while arrests by Staffordshire Police have dropped by 68 per cent in the same period.

The figures have been released by the Howard League for Penal Reform, which launched a programme in 2010 to keep as many children out of the criminal justice system as possible.

Research by the charity found West Midlands Police made 5,244 arrests of children aged 17 and under last year, down from 14,387 in 2010.

Staffordshire Police made 1,350 arrests last year, down from 4,163 in 2010.

Brigg Ford, a spokesman for West Midlands Police, said the force 'could not speculate' as to why there had been such a severe drop in the figures.

Staffordshire Police said it was looking to further reduce the number of children it arrests.

Inspector Martin Steventon, from the force's integrated offender management team, said: "Staffordshire Police continues to work closely with partner agencies, such as the youth offending services and national bodies, as we aim to further reduce the number of children arrested."

Station hiccup as funding rejected

AMBITIOUS plans for a new railway station have taken a blow after a funding bid was rejected.

Walsall Council submitted a bid to the Department for Transport back in December last year for funding to build a new station in Willenhall.

If accepted, the station would have been built in the centre of Willenhall and included a small car park and ticketing office. The council, which is working with Transport for West Midlands on the plans, is now looking at alternative funding and bidding opportunities to get the station running.

Councillor Sean Coughlan, the leader of the council, said: "We will continue to look at alternative funds and bidding opportunities to secure better links between our towns."

Groove on down

HIP-HOP dance company ZooNation are on tour. They will be performing Groove On Down the Road at the Arena Theatre in Wulfruna Street Wolverhampton, on August 31 and September 1 at 7.30pm. Tickets are £8.

60 glorious years for Wolves-mad couple

Gladys and Hank Giles, mark their 60th

A FOOTBALL-mad couple who met on the way to a Wolves match are still going strong 60 years on from the day they got wed.

Gladys and Hank Giles met at 15 and 16 years old respectively on the way to a Wolves match. It was 1953 when they first locked eyes, the year Wolves were first crowned champions of the First Division.

The pair promised to see each other after the match, going on to the local youth club for some table tennis. Four years later they got married at Featherstone Methodist Church.

Hank said: "We said we will see each other when we get back and we had a go at table tennis then we were the only ones from the gang who got together."

Children followed, a girl in 1960, and a boy was born two years later. Now the couple are fortunate enough to not only have two grandchildren but they are eagerly anticipating the arrival of their first great grandchild, due in November.

Mr Giles worked at Wolverhampton's famous Goodyear factory for 20 years. Mrs Giles worked in a key factory, but retired 38 years ago due to an injury.

At 79 and 80 years old, they now live in Essington and are enjoying retirement spending as many days in the sun doing gardening which is a hobby of theirs. They were due to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary by spending a week in Llandudno, but there have been many special dinners with friends and family as well.

As for the secret of a happy marriage, Mr Giles said: "We have had our ups and downs just like everyone else but we are still here."

Walsall GP surgeries are under threat in shake up

TWO doctor's surgeries face closure and a further six would merge under radical plans to revamp Walsall's GP services.

The proposals, which also include scrapping weekend and out-of-hours appointments for five surgeries, will affect more than 30,000 patients.

Walsall Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is proposing to close Kingfisher Medical Practice, based at Bentley Medical Centre on Churchill Road in Bentley, and Keys Family Practice, based at Willenhall Health Centre on Field Street in Willenhall.

The two practices look after 4,768 and 4,808 patients respectively.

If the closures did go ahead, Walsall CCG is advising patients to attend either Berkley Practice or Stroud Practice at Bentley Medical Centre, or one of the three practices based at Willenhall Medical Centre.

Plans have also been tabled to merge Manor Medical, Wharf Family Practice and Sai Medical Practice, as well as Blakenall Family Practice, Harden Family Practice and Coalpool Family Practice.

The closures and merges are on top of plans to stop five practices – Collingwood Family Practice, Keys Family Practice, Coalpool Family Practice, Harden Family Practice and Wharf Family Practice – opening some evenings and weekends.

Instead, Walsall CCG is proposing to provide evening and weekend services at some hub GP practices in the borough.

This move would affect 20,460 patients, with the CCG's overall proposals, including mergers and closures, affecting 37,692.

A consultation on the mergers, closures and opening times is running until September 6.

Walsall CCG chairman, Dr Anand Rischie, said: "It is important that we hold consultation so we can have discussions and engage with local residents."

Four events take place throughout August, with two remaining on August 22, 6.30pm to 8.30pm, at Keys Family Practice, Field Street, Willenhall; and August 30, 2.30pm to 4.30pm, at Kingfisher Practice, Churchill Road, Walsall.

Fuchsia society tickled pink at show

John Sanders, of Willenhall, with his award-winning fuschia at The Hub in Griffiths Drive, Ashmore Park

THE best blooming plants from a horticultural club were put on display as part of a competition held to showcase the talent of its members.

Grown by Black Country Fuchsia Society members, dozens of fuchsias were put on display at The Hub at Ashmore Park, near Willenhall. With a total of 37 categories to be won, trophies lined the side of the hall ready to be presented to the winners.

Organisers of the society said they were particularly pleased that younger members had joined their ranks this year.

Pat Rogers, aged 79, chairman of the event, said: "I think there is a fantastic amount which are on show here.

"It has been a fantastic event for me because we have a young member who is 14."

The society, which is made up of about 50 members, is on the lookout for new blood. Members meet once a month at the Corpus Christi Social Centre in Wednesfield. The meetings are held on the last Tuesday of the month, except for December, between 7.30pm to 11pm.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jewellery raider got in via dog flap

JEWELLERY and cash were taken from a home in Pelsall after a burglar made his way into the property through a dog flap.

The burglary took place between 7.45am on July 31 and 1.30pm on Tuesday August 1 at a house in Lichfield Road. After making their way into the house through the dog flap and taking the items, the burglar used a spare key from inside to leave.

Kevin Pitt, a West Midlands Police engagement and consultation officer for Walsall, said: "If you saw or heard anything or have any information please call our non emergency number 101, quoting 20WS/167588Y/17."

Fury over car park chaos at Wolves

WOLVES fans are furious after they were locked in car parks near Molineux following the first home game of the season.

Supporters were kept inside eight car parks under a new health and safety move to allow crowds to clear on busy routes after matches.

There were angry scenes as some fans threatened to smash chains on padlocks as cars became gridlocked near exits at car parks.

The gates were locked 15 minutes before the full-time whistle at around 5pm and reopened at 5.11pm.

Historic locks firm is put up for sale

THE headquarters of an historic locks firm in Willenhall has been put up for sale. ERA has been in the town for nearly two centuries but is set to move to a new purpose-built site at the i54 business park in Wolverhampton.

Its existing premises in Straight Road, in Short Heath, will be left vacant following the move.

It has been put on the market by property agents Harris Lamb as a 'freehold warehouse site' and although no asking price has been stated it is thought they are anticipating offers in excess of £1.5 million.

Firms' window stickers showcase awards win

TRIUMPHANT independent firms have now been issued with window stickers to showcase their success.

There were 12 winners at last month's inaugural Wolverhampton Independent Retail Excellence (WIRE) which were sponsored by our sister daily the Express & Star.

The awards were led by Wolverhampton Business Improvement District (BID) in partnership with the city council.

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Poetry in our lingo? That caw be roight!

I'M sure they meant well, but the decision to turn next month's National Poetry Day into a celebration of regional dialects bears all the hallmarks of the ivory-tower academics patronising the hoi-polloi by trying to use a bit of their lingo.

Poets from different parts of the UK have been asked to choose a word exclusive to their local dialect, and write a poem about it.

According to lexicographer Susie Dent, the aim is to "shine a light into a lexicon that's too often overlooked." Which I think, translated into English, means learning about words people in other areas may not be familiar with. Yet isn't exclusivity the whole point of these words?

Believe it or not, most people in the Black Country don't talk about wammels, gleeds, or being clemmed to jeth due to a shortage of bostin fettle in their everyday discourse any more than they doff their cap when the Earl of Dudley trots past in his horse drawn carriage. But we are immensely attached to it because it is part of our heritage, identity, who we are. The last thing we want to hear is some shiny-faced pundit from the Home Counties talking about bibbles and reasty donnies with a curled lip and a knowing smile.

You only have to look at the regions represented by the project to get a flavour of how it is going to pan out. Merseyside, Humberside, Cumbria. Who, outside of the quangocracy, identifies themselves as being from Merseyside? They are from Liverpool, St Helen's, or The Wirral. Cumbria? Didn't exist until 1974, and most of us think of it as being the Lake District. And many years working with a dyed-in-the-wool native of Hull left me in no doubt that references to "Humberside" would not be well-received.

These are areas with no historic or cultural identity, but rather parcels of land drawn up by outside politicians and bureaucrats for the convenience of outside politicians and bureaucrats.

And then we come to the West Midlands, where the problem was highlighted perfectly by the BBC vox pop on the word that had been chosen to represent the area, "bobowler".

Now I know what a bobowler is. You probably know what one is. But the presenters could barely contain their amusement at the obscurity of the work, and nobody the roving reporter spoke to had a clue what it meant . Which is not that surprising, really.

Because bobowler – a butterfly or large moth – is unique to the Black Country. And the BBC man was asking people in central Birmingham.

Bostin, ay it? Yo caw put a price on that.

Adventurers abound alongside amiable antipodeans

Grylls and spills – exploring a headline which was in a national newspaper

Adventurer Pen Hadow – poles apart from sanity? As he returns on his chilly quest

Australian High Commissioner Alexander Downer, not at all living up to his name

Snow way for Pen to reach pole goal

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

CONFUSING headline of the week. "I survived on insects like Bear Grylls, says man lost in outback for three days." (Daily Telegraph).

ANYONE else confused by Hugh's (Josh Whitehouse) plea to the lovely Demelza (Eleanor Tomlinson) in the finale of Poldark (BBC1)? Hugh is going blind and mumbling a bit. As far as I could hear, he told Mrs Poldark that he wanted a snog in order to go into the darkness "knowing I once tasted Devon." Heaven, apparently.

IN May 1998, for reasons I won't tire you with, I was standing on an ice floe 200 miles from the North Pole at 20 degrees below zero, watching a councillor from Wolverhampton trying to persuade an Arctic explorer to pack it in and come home (like I say, it's complicated). The explorer, Pen Hadow, was making absolutely no progress on his way to the pole. Every day he trekked a few miles north across the floes and pitched his tent. As he slept, the floes drifted a few miles south. But, despite the pain, cold and polar bears, he refused to be rescued. All we could do, after a perilous 14-hour flight to find him, was give him extra food and a small boat and wish him well. Hadow carried on trekking north for a few more days before being rescued by a navy vessel. Now, at 55, he's off again, leading a party trying to sail two yachts to the pole to demonstrate climate change. Back in '98 he struck me as utterly bonkers and a tad selfish. But above all, a tiny dot at the top of the world, limping on with an injured knee, he looked incredibly vulnerable. I would not have put money on him being alive, let alone still exploring, nearly 20 years later.

IF I learned anything from my Arctic adventure, it is not to eat luke-warm runny egg sandwiches as one's Twin Otter makes its final approach to land on a large piece of ice. This is needlessly adding nausea to terror. One of my few claims to fame is that I have thrown up at 86 degrees north.

ALEXANDER Downer. How did he slip through the net? The Australian High Commissioner popped up on the BBC's flagship radio programme Today this week and dared to utter the O-word about Brexit. Optimism. At a time when the only acceptable liberal-left narrative is that leaving the EU will destroy the country and sentence our grandchildren to eternal serfdom, Downer said some Brits were being a bit too glum. I will not poison your tender minds with more of his antipodean joy. As my mailbox over the past few days shows, some Brits are positively slavering for disaster. They cannot wait for armageddon. They are aching to embrace dereliction. How dare some cheerful Aussie walk on their dreams?

A BBC schools video on Roman Britain features a black soldier. The historian Mary Beard says Roman Britain was indeed ethnically diverse. For this, she has been pilloried on social media (why don't we call it antisocial media?). Consider what Rudyard Kipling, proud spokesman for the British Empire and the man who urged us to "Take up the white man's burden," had to say on the subject. You might imagine that Kipling, of all people, would believe in an ethnically pure, all-white ancient Britain. Not so. In his poem about the Thames, The River's Tale, he writes: "And Norseman and Negro and Gaul and Greek / Drank with the Britons in Barking Creek ." A black face in Londinium 1,800 years ago would have attracted no more attention than it does today.

THANKS for your horror stories of deliveries by couriers. I loved the tale from a reader who received a text message that a parcel would be delivered to his address at 11am. Which was odd because he wasn't expecting anything. Next came a text with an image, apparently showing the parcel delivered by his side door. It turned out the photo was of somebody else's side door. The parcel, which had nothing to do with him, had been safely delivered to an address in Liverpool. The reader lives in Walsall.

THANKS, too, for your tales about dodgy pub quizzes. They reminded me of the one occasion when I objected to a quiz result, on the grounds that the rules stipulated teams of four and the "winning" team had six. "Oh, it's just a bit of fun," laughed their captain, collecting a handsome prize. Depends on what you call fun.

YOU are about to leave a restaurant and ask for the bill. "How much would you like to pay?" says the waiter. "Just the bill, please," you insist. "Yes," says the waiter, "but how much?" Bonkers? Of course it is. Yet this is how Britain's "divorce bill" from the European Union is being decided. They want us to suggest a figure. We should tell Brussels to do the sums and give us a properly itemised invoice. Then we can move on to the "I never had fried rice" argument, followed by tearing up the bill and rushing for the door.

TALKING POINT

Cyclists: Go bike to basics on safety

DRIVING home down the dark country lanes I cornered – luckily quite slowly – to be confronted by not one, but two cyclists.

As they were riding two abreast and pretty much taking up most of that side of the road I had two options: I go round them, right across the other side of the road, putting myself and drivers on the other side at risk; or I wait until they put their brains into gear to choose the safer option to cycle single file.

Yes you guessed it, no thought on their behalf and I am forced to do the former, thankfully there was nothing coming the other way although I still had to drive behind them for around half a mile before it was safe to go past – blind corners.

How many times has this situation been the case? And I have to say on most occasions it has been cyclists wearing the tops with their cycling club name on the back. I feel tempted to ring the club up and tell them how irresponsible this is. It's not the thing that most 'Joe Bloggs' cyclists do. Surely if you are a member of a club you should know how to ride safely, even if you are racing against the clock. My husband and I recently returned from France where most of the cities and towns are well-blessed with cycle lanes and they are very well used. But even with the advantage of these special lanes the cyclists do not abuse the system by straying outside the lines and into the drivers' area.

When our children were small they all had bikes and we would go on rides as a family. They were always taught to keep single file, cycle in the middle of the line with adults taking the front and back positions, and never to ride alongside chatting to each other.

Another thing that was a no-no was cycling with headphones on. My husband drove behind a cyclist and tooted to show that the rider was straying to the middle of the road. He totally ignored him. When he finally passed, he realised why – headphones with music blasting in his ears. He had no idea there was even a car there, and yes, he was a club cyclist!

And just one more gripe, years ago, not a safety issue this time, more one of good taste. We once had a colleague who cycled into work – very admirable – the only problem was when he got here he did get changed but left his sweaty clothes and, even worse his trainers, steaming at the side of the office. Not pleasant. Fortunately he has now left and no doubt is stinking out somebody else's office. Not nice but at least this won't kill you!!

SUE ATTWATER

● See next week's Talking Point as we give the cyclist's verdict on drivers.

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How long will green belt go on?

GREEN belt for how long? E & S, August 1, has articles on HS2, Four Ashes Freight Terminal and green belt threat.

Our already excessive population is already increasing by almost half a million a year. The days when planning could define areas as green belt are gone. Planning is now reduced to directing an insatiable demand for building wherever it can.

With thousands of houses already built on green belt, and many more proposed, the myth that brown field sites can save green belt is exposed. Local victories where green belt is saved do not solve the problem they merely move it on.

Are we too stupid and selfish to allow economic growth, fuelled by rampant development and soaring population, at the expense of bequeathing an environmental disaster for future generations?

Every protest at green belt development should be accompanied by a demand to government urgently to take population growth seriously.

KEITH WATKINS
Walsall

Revitalise carers and loved ones

DID your readers know that there are 6.8 million carers in the UK and every day another 6,000 people take on a caring responsibility? Unpaid carers face huge challenges providing care for disabled or older loved ones.

I work for a fantastic charity called Revitalise. We provide much-needed respite holidays for disabled people and carers at three accessible UK centres, and we're appealing to the nation on BBC Radio 4 to ask for more support for the nation's unsung army of carers.

Our Appeal will be presented by our good friend, the writer and comedian Arthur Smith, who is a Vice-President of Revitalise. Arthur talks about his own experience as a carer for his mother Hazel.

The appeal will be broadcast on Radio 4 on Sunday at 7.55am and 9.26pm, then repeated on Thursday 17, at 3.27pm. To find out more visit www.revitalise.org.uk

Please help.

COLIN BROOK
Revitalise

Not just two-party affair at the council

IN reply to Cllr Richard Worrall's letter of August 3, whilst his remarks regarding the activists were positive, the remainder of the letter could be deemed either mischievously misleading or deliberately vexatious.

He states 'Given that Walsall Council is at parity with 30 Labour/Lib Dem and 30 Conservative councillors and allies, but with a casting vote – Marco Longi, a Pelsall Councillor, no less! – why didn't Councillor Bird take control?'

I would like to point out the Council is not at 'parity', whilst Labour have paid for their alliance with the two Lib Dems with a Cabinet position for Cllr Shires, there are 25 Conservatives, 3 UKIP and 2 Independent councillors. I would remind Cllr Worrall that there is no agreement between UKIP Councillors and the Conservatives. He may think we live in a two party state, along with far too many who voted in the last General Election, but we don't.

CLLR LIZ HAZELL
Willenhall North Ward
UKIP Group Leader

Time to stop hate crimes

I HAVE been hearing a lot about 'hate crime' recently and I sympathise with the victims of such a horrendous crime.

However, we often hear of race-hate crime. I have a friend – white male, disabled and gay – he has been a victim of 'hate crime' over a number of years. The police and council ASB department make 'noises' and sympathise – but don't actually do anything.

Why should someone in this day and age be subjected to this kind of abuse?

Often too scared to leave his home, and never unaccompanied because the 'powers that be' won't come down heavily on the offender. Is it because the offender(s) happen to be of a different ethnicity to my white friend, the victim, I can only imagine this is so.

S HASOOD-KHAN
Walsall

More than book-lending

RE: libraries and Richard Worrall, Thursday August 3. I've ploughed through Richard Worrall's letter and think that Mike Bird can answer for himself.

Nevertheless, Mr Worrall, with his well-known love for leisure centres, still fails to understand that a library is much more than a 'book-lending facility'.

Throwing up his hands and asking why Mike Bird does not take control of the council scarcely answers the reason why the Labour Group on Walsall Council has thrown up its hands at any cultural endeavour.

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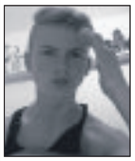
Coroner airs fears on child safety at pool

MORE children could die at a pool where a schoolboy drowned if immediate action is not taken to improve safety, a coroner has said.

Zafar Siddique said nothing had been done since 15-year-old Spencer Hurst died at Ryders Hayes Mere in Walsall in June.


Spencer Hurst

The senior Black Country coroner revealed he had 'grave concerns' about the lake and criticised a lack of fencing and warning signs.

Spencer got into difficulty while swimming with friends at the pool which is popular with children. He was pulled out by divers but pronounced dead a short time later.

The teenager's death came 10 years after another boy, Keerian White, 17, drowned in the pool. Speaking at a pre-inquest hearing, Mr Siddique said he had taken the 'unusual step' to write a report as he was so concerned about the danger to other children.

He insisted he had an obligation to act if he felt there was a 'risk to life'.

The director of the company that owns the Pelsall site, Parkhill Estates, has been summoned to attend a full inquest scheduled for next month.

Mr Siddique said: "It is not clear to me about signage there and if anything is being done. It causes me some real concerns."

Mr Siddique also requested that Walsall Council be represented at the inquest on September 18 as he wanted to know if the authority has had involvement over the site.

Spencer's mother Joanne Fellows, aged 47, said the lake must be made safer to prevent any future deaths.

Floral tributes which were laid by the pool following the tragedy

Ryders Hayes Mere, which is a popular haunt for youngsters

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Lock sculpture will move to new home

How the iconic lock sculpture will look on the Keyway Island in Willenhall

A WELL-KNOWN lock sculpture will be moved from its Wednesfield spot to a new home on the Keyway Island in Willenhall.

The sculpture, which depicts levers on a stainless steel frame, currently sits at Assa Abloy in Wednesfield. It will now be relocated to the Keyway Island, which links Willenhall Road, Somerford Place, The Keyway and New Street.

The move was given the green-light by Walsall Council. Wolverhampton council has agreed that the sculpture can be moved.

As part of the project, money will also be spent on sprucing up the Portobello War Memorial.

Academy in hub scheme

WALSALL Academy has submitted proposals to build a two-storey 'Employability Hub' at its site which school chiefs say is 'badly needed.'

The academy wants to construct an 11,270 sq ft building at its premises at Lichfield Road, Bloxwich.

Chiefs at the large secondary, which has more than 1,000 pupils, say hundreds of its pupils are being trained externally but now the school needed its own on-site facility.

They have lodged an official planning application with Walsall Council.

One of the submitted documents states: "The Employability Hub will provide full time training for students in preparation for apprenticeships and enable the Academy to develop links with local business and training partners to help their students gain meaningful and sustainable employment.

"Currently up to 20 per cent of the students at Walsall Academy pursue high quality, industry standard occupational training courses.

"External facilities have been used to deliver this training up to the present time, but increasing pupil numbers mean that this is no longer practical and on-site facilities are badly needed."

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Aer Lingus targets US gap at Brum airport

IRISH airline Aer Lingus is adding 50,000 seats to its schedule between Birmingham and Dublin this winter as it aims to pull in passengers bound for the US.

Birmingham Airport is losing its last direct flights to the US in October, when United Airlines pulls out. A replacement direct service to the States, to be run by budget carrier Primera, doesn't get off the ground until May next year.

That leaves a gap in the market that Aer Lingus aims to plug, jetting passengers from Birmingham to its major hub in Dublin in just 40 minutes. The Irish airline also runs a service enabling customers to clear US customs and immigration before they leave Dublin. Fares from the UK to Dublin start from £24.99 each-way.

Owner of missing macaw refuses to give up search

'AFTER five heartbreaking weeks of searching for my beautiful macaw I'm feeling well and truly broken.'

Owner Angie Rothery has told of her ongoing agony at the loss of her pet parrot Charlie.

She spent five hours in one day hunting for her beloved pet at the weekend and has had help from dozens of people but to no avail.

A reward of £1,000 has now been increased to £1,500 in the hope of finding Charlie who went missing from Angie and Adrian Rothery's home in Rushall, Walsall, back on July 7.

Countless

Since then, search parties have been organised with dozens of people taking part and there have been countless sightings across the Walsall area. The appeal has also been shared more than 4,000 times on Facebook.

Mrs Rothery, who works at the Hollybush Garden Centre in Shareshill where she works with her daughter, wrote on her Facebook page: "I can't remember when the last positive sighting of Charlie was although a few said they saw her yesterday and the day before. I truly hope this is right because if not it can only mean one of two things , either something awful has happened to her which I really hope that's not the case or someone has got her."

Angie Rothery and others in search of Charlie the missing macaw

She described Charlie as 'my world, my best friend' and said: "I love and miss her so much."

The parrot, a blue and gold macaw, used to go on holiday with its owners, going everywhere from St Tropez to Cornwall. The two-year-old, which can say 'stop it', 'do you want this' and 'hello', is defined by its long tail and four foot wing span.

Mr Rothery said: "The search has been widened. We are still concentrating on the local area but we understand there is a possibility she may have gone further afield. There has been no positive sightings recently which is disheartening.

"We are cutting back on calls of people saying they heard a strange bird. We need people to see the blue and yellow and ideally take a picture." Anyone with any information is asked to contact the Rotherys on 07771 890720.

Third time lucky for plaque hit by vandals

A NEW plaque has been installed at Willenhall library – and community campaigners hope it will be third time lucky.

Two previous plaques have been targeted by vandals, but organisers are now urging people to show their pride in the area and leave it be.

The plaque was installed in 2014 to mark the unveiling of the area's very own flag designed by Adam Leonard to recognise its world-famous lock industry and civic achievements.

It was donated by stonemasons Brett Quintons and the flag's unveiling coincided with a visit by guests from Willenhall's twin town of Drancy, in France.

Anger

Vandals are suspected to have taken a hammer to the granite stone plaque for the first time just seven months after it was first installed.

A passer-by reported the damage when the plaque was spotted smashed into four pieces in June 2015 and representatives from community group Willenhall Ay We told of their their anger and disappointment.

The plaque was then replaced in 2016 but was destroyed once again in May this year, left as nothing but rubble.

Now the plaque, featuring an image of the blue and red flag displaying keys, locks and a crown will be unveiled for the third time.

Kalie Plant, organiser at Wilenhall Ay We, said: "Many thanks once again to Brett Quinton of Brett Quinton Funeral Services, Willenhall for covering the costs of a new one and a massive thanks to Glen from Keybit Services who has donated his time in producing and installing the plaque.

Members of Willenhall Ay We, Glyn Marston, Kalie Plant and Glen Keybit

"Those who are targeting this plaque, need to realise this is for Willenhall – more importantly for the people of Willenhall so that they can be proud to have their own flag – not many towns can say that.

"So please, embrace the flag and Fly the Flag for Willenhall."

Willenhall Ay We is a group made up of volunteers that focuses on events and communities in the area along with projects such as the plaque.

The organisation will be hosting a special charity quiz night at the 442 nightspot on September 1 to raise money for its three chosen charities for 2017.

These are St Giles Hospice in Walsall, Macmillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK.

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Rugby star Marlie says goodbye to colleagues

ENGLAND Women's Rugby star Marlie Packer said goodbye to her HomeServe colleagues to join teammates in the Women's Rugby World Cup squad.

Flanker and plumber Marlie, aged 27, dropped in to see colleagues at HomeServe's Walsall HQ on Friday August 4, before clocking off for the final time ahead of the tournament.

Marlie, who was part of England's World Cup winning side three years ago, joined up with the rest of the squad, but she was not part of the squad which beat Spain 56-5.

She said: "Everyone at HomeServe has been so supportive of my rugby ever since I joined and it's been so reassuring to have that behind me.

"I've been working really hard towards this tournament for a long time now and I'm just excited to get going.

"But I couldn't leave without popping in to see everyone and say a massive thank you to everyone who has given me so much support. HomeServe has been like an extra player for me on and off the pitch and I really don't think I would have achieved what I have done without them."

Marlie has combined her career as an international rugby player with her work at HomeServe since she joined the firm in 2013.

And if she plays in all three pool games, she will reach the magical mark of 50 caps for her country. HomeServe brand director John Greaves added: "We're so proud of Marlie and of everything she has achieved both in her rugby and in her career at HomeServe.

"It was great to see her to wish her luck."

In action for the England side

Marlie in her work clothes

Colleagues of Marlie at Homeserve wish her well before she joined the team

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Care home making progress, say chiefs

A FAILING care home is making progress but is still inadequate, health bosses have ruled.

Inspectors from the Care Quality Commission have revisited Leighswood care home on Lichfield Road in Rushall after it was placed in special measures back in January.

The home's safety, responsiveness, leadership, effectiveness and care were all rated inadequate with particular concerns raised over the way some patients were being moved. But after an inspection in June, where inspectors looked purely at the home's safety, it was ruled the home was making the required improvements, on course to come out of special measures.

Report by Jack Averty

A report prepared by the CQC states: "At this inspection we found some improvements had been made but further improvements were still required. The provider was no longer in breach of the two regulations in relation to the key question we reviewed. The overall rating for the service remains 'Inadequate'.

"People and their relatives told us there had been improvements and said they now felt safe. Staff told us following our last inspection they had received training in how to move people safely. We saw people were now being moved using safe techniques. However, the provider was unable to demonstrate the hoist used to transfer people was safe and action was taken to address this. People told us they got their medicines when they needed them. We found improvements were still needed to record when people had skin patches or prescribed creams applied. Records did not demonstrate what action staff took when people regularly refused their medicine. Although some improvements had been made we found further improvements were required to ensure people got their medicine as prescribed.

"People told us there were sufficient staff to meet their needs. We saw staff were available when people required any support and staff were available to spend time with people. The manager told us they had now considered the staffing levels on a night time."

The home has since had a full re-inspection with its new rating due out later this year.

On track for kindness at park

Thomas the Tank Engine, one of the stalwarts of Drayton Manor, near Walsall

KINDNESS is the name of the game at Drayton Manor Park, with fantastic prizes on offer.

The theme park is carrying out its Summer Random Acts of Kindness campaign throughout August. Visitors will be selected at random for free treats which might be anything from a donut, or a stay and play package.

William Bryan managing director of the park said: "A big part of our ethos is providing happiness and fun family memories for all, which is why we'll be giving away some lovely prizes throughout August. We'll also be giving away more goodies at different locations in the Midlands over the next few weeks, so watch this space!"

To book tickets, or for more information about the park, visit www.draytonmanor.co.uk or call 0844 472 1950.

MP Fabricant backs £1bn deal on trains

MP MICHAEL Fabricant has welcomed the new West Midlands rail franchise and its £1 billion investment. It was announced this week that West Midlands Trains Ltd – a joint venture between Dutch company Abellio, and Japanese duo East Japan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co – has been awarded the rights to the West Midlands railway network from later this year.

Mr Fabricant has now spoken out in favour of the deal, which will see the new operator invest £1 billion in the network, including smart ticketing, free Wi-Fi and expansion of services – promises to passengers include 400 new carriages rolled out by 2021.

The Lichfield MP said: "The new West Midlands trains franchise which will replace London Midland will undoubtedly benefit commuters from Lichfield Trent Valley and Lichfield City stations with 100 new carriages on the Cross City Line and compensation if there are delays of over 15 minutes."

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Scarred pilot tells of plane propeller horror

A FORMER RAF engineer was smashed in the face by the propeller of his own plane in a freak accident, leaving him with serious injuries.

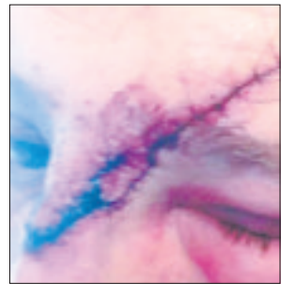
Dominic Whelan, from Willenhall, 'thought he was going to die' when he was slashed by the blade as he carried out work on his microlight at Otherton Airfield in Penkridge.

Four weeks later he wrecked the aircraft, nicknamed Floaty McFloatface, in a crash. Mr Whelan and his 15-year-old son Michael escaped unhurt.

But the 42-year-old has not been put off flying and has even kept the propeller as a souvenir of the day he describes as being 'like a Carry On' film.

A report into the accident in March revealed how his plane, a Mercury microlight, had jumped over a block put in front of its wheel to keep it in place, and rolled forward 10 feet.

Mr Whelan, with the offending propeller



His injuries, which required 24 stitches

Flying in his microlight aircraft

Struck

Fearing for the safety of another man at the airfield, off Micklewood Lane, Mr Whelan leapt out of his plane to get the chock without turning off the propellers.

Not being able to see the propellers as they were going at such speed, the former RAF serviceman leant down to get the block from the back of the plane when he was struck across the face by the propeller. He said: "When I did it it took a couple of seconds to realise what had happened. I put my hand to my face, saw the claret coming down, and felt a hole. I fell forward and swore I was going to die."

His partner, 39-year-old Rachel Daker, added: "The first thing he did was phone us as he was holding his face together. He spoke to Mikey who phoned me. I didn't realise how bad it was and so I went home first to get some plasters and bandages."

Men working at the airfield rushed to Mr Whelan's aid but it soon became like a scene out of a Carry On film, he says, as an air ambulance despatched to take him to Royal Stoke Hospital had no fuel and the ambulance he was then put in got stuck in mud.

Eventually he made it to the trauma centre at the north Staffordshire hospital and after several hours and more than two dozen stitches he was allowed home to Pooles Lane. Mr Whelan still bares a scar across his face from the accident five months ago and admits his face still hurts every day.

The newly-published Air Accident Investigation Branch report into the incident on March 26 states Mr Whelan had just 33 hours flying experience before the accident.

But he has dismissed claims he was a 'novice' having served in the RAF for 13 years and being around planes for 20 years.

"It was just a lapse in concentration," he said.

Have a say on Black Country's future

Commercial feature

People from across the Black Country are being encouraged to have their say on a review of the Black Country Core Strategy.

Views are needed on how Black Country authorities can best meet housing, economic development and transport needs, as well as protecting the local environment to help shape the future of the area.

Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton councils are all working together to achieve the very best future for local communities through the strategy which is a key planning and regeneration tool for the whole of the Black Country.

Investment

It plans for the area's future local development needs and directs services to the right locations to meet local needs. It also makes sure the necessary level of investment is attracted to create jobs and wealth in our region.

The current strategy was adopted by the four councils in 2011.

It has shaped the housing, industrial and retail growth of the area, whilst protecting the environment and greenbelt. It has also been successful in supporting regeneration for the past six years.

The strategy now needs to be reviewed to meet the new challenges and opportunities for the coming years, up to 2036.

A public consultation will make sure that everyone across the Black Country has the opportunity to have their say on the plans for the area.

The new core strategy will provide the framework for growth and development across the Black Country up to 2036.

It is really important that people who live and work in the area help shape it, so it reflects the aspirations of local people.

There are ten key issues that people's views are being sought on: meeting housing needs, supporting the economy, supporting town centres, protecting the environment, reviewing the green belt, keeping the Black Country connected, providing community facilities to support growth, people's health and wellbeing, working with our neighbours and regeneration across the Black Country.

Around 78,000 new homes need to be built in the Black Country over the next 20 years. There are enough brownfield sites to deliver around 56,000 homes, but new plots of land need to be found for an extra 22,000 homes as the population and economy of the area continues to grow.

There is also a need to find new employment land to expand the economy and create jobs. We need to decide where this development should go.

Making the most of brownfield land remains the top priority, however, in the coming decades sites like this are going to run out and the green belt will need to be reviewed to find more development sites to meet future needs.

Decisions also need to be made about the infrastructure required to support new development, including transport, schools and shops.

The consultation is open until September 8 2017. It's easy to take part by visiting blackcountrycorestrategy.dudley.gov.uk where all the documents are available to read and people can fill in a questionnaire online.

A leaflet, which includes a prepaid questionnaire, is also available at local libraries. Please email blackcountrycorestrategy@dudley.gov.uk or call 01384 814136 for more details.

Consultation events will be running across the Black Country throughout the consultation period, dates and venues for these are detailed below.

As part of the consultation, there is also a "Call for Sites" where people can put forward areas of land they feel may be suitable for development.

When the consultation closes all feedback will be collated, considered and used to help develop the next stage of the strategy – which will identify key locations for future development.

The views of local people will help plan for the very best future for the Black Country.

Views are being sought on how best to protect the environment as the strategy is reviewed

The strategy will also look at retail growth, employment and the economy

The Black Country needs your voice

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Consultation closes September 8 2017

Black Country | Core Strategy
Planning for the future of the Black Country

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Walsall Council
City of Wolverhampton Council
Black Country - See it in colour

Community workers shed light on new base

KEEN woodworkers and volunteers are shedding light on community projects thanks to a new home – in a shed.

The Tanhouse Shedders welcomed the Mayor of Sandwell to officially open their new base in Hamstead Road, Great Barr, thanks to support from Sandwell Council.

The council teamed up with the Royal Voluntary Service and the National UK Sheds Association to set up The Tanhouse Shedders at the Tanhouse Centre. Shed projects are designed and run by their members and provide opportunities to take part in practical woodwork skills and activities and share tools and resources.

Difference

Sandwell's deputy leader and cabinet member for neighbourhoods and communities, Councillor Syeda Khatun, said: "These projects make a real difference to the health and well-being of those who take part and I'd urge anyone who is interested to go along, have a cup of tea and find out more about their local group. I'd particularly like to thank the council's community partnership project officer Bal Dhillon for her hard work on this project over the past 18 months."

Phil Willoughby, Tanhouse Shedders secretary, added: "We are very grateful for the provision of Portacabin by Sandwell Council together with the award of a Local Area Budget Grant. It has allowed us to start the first Shed Association in Sandwell."

For more information email sandwellmensshed@gmail.com visit the Facebook page www.facebook.com/sandwellmensshed or call Bal Dhillon on 0121 569 5177.

The Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Ahmadul Haque opens the new Tanhouse Shed-

Dancing is fairy enough

FAIRY tale magic will spread across Sandwell Valley at a free open air dance show. The Fairy Tale Dance show on Sunday features a range of dance and drama based on classic and modern fairy tales.

Visitors are encouraged to bring a picnic and enjoy performances by Diamond Drama, Keneish Dance and Unfold Dance Theatre Company.

Councillor Richard Marshall, cabinet member for leisure, said: "The show is on the front paddock outside the Park Farm building where people can hire a traditional seaside deckchair or make use of free-to-use picnic blankets."

Two performances are planned starting at 10am-12.45pm and then 1.30-3.45pm.For more information, contact Alex Howell on 07827 305784 or 0121 556 0683.

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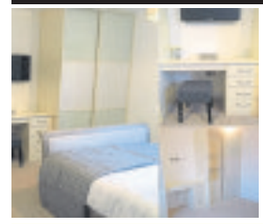
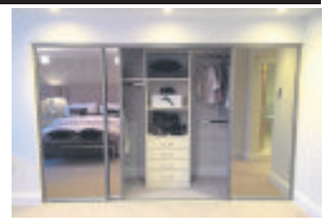

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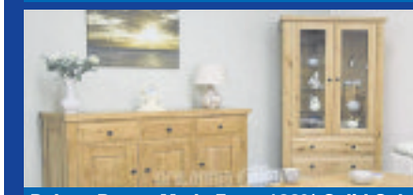
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Students get gold after 40-mile trek in the wild

Eldair with college principal Graham Pennington and DofE Manager David Hughes

Marta receives her award from Sandwell College Principal Graham Pennington

TWO intrepid Sandwell College students have struck gold by gaining the top Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Both Marta Szmyt and Eldair Ngoma braved torrential rain to trek 50 miles across Dartmoor during a four-day expedition in the wild.

They will now receive Gold Award Certificates from Prince Edward at a formal presentation at a Royal Palace in London.

The Duke of Edinburgh himself, retired from official royal duties earlier this month.

Central Sixth student Marta volunteered as a group leader for 18 months with Walsall Pathfinders and Adventurers.

Club director Cherry Scarlett said: "Marta has gained a lot of confidence in her creative abilities, which makes her a fantastic teacher. Her dedication, attendance (she didn't miss one meeting), organisation and talent can be seen in the achievement of her students."

The 19-year-old former Blue Coat C of E Academy student also spent 12 months improving her physical fitness in the gym and learned to play the ukulele from scratch in six months.

Marta then completed a week of classical civilisation and ancient history summer school.

DofE Gold Expedition Assessor, Nick Muir, said: "Marta coped extremely well with the very challenging conditions of Dartmoor. Well done – a pleasure to assess."

Marta is now awaiting her A-level results in history, philosophy and biology after being offered university places at Nottingham and Birmingham to study a degree in Ancient History.

Public Services student Eldair spent 18 months volunteering in the West Bromwich Barnardo's shop to complete his award. Shop manager Eve Baker said: "Eldair has always conducted himself in a professional manner, always willing to help both customers, and his peers.

"He has also on occasions mentored new staff to assist with their training."

The 18-year-old former Aldridge School student spent 12 months improving his physical fitness in the gym, ultimately weightlifting 40kg, and is now ready to take his test after learning to drive.

Eldair also completed a residential week with National Citizen Service.

DofE Gold Expedition Assessor, Nick Muir, said: "Eldair's group worked well together through the difficulties they encountered with navigation and weather conditions. Their camping skills and food selection were good."

Eldair is now set to pursue a career in policing after being offered university places at Coventry, De Montfort and Derby.

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Mother in call for two chiefs to resign

THE mother of a 24-year-old man who was failed by Walsall Manor Hospital before dying from a brain haemorrhage has called for the resignation of two bosses.

Tracey Ankrett has refuted an independent investigation that concluded the hospital was not to blame for her son Mark's death in 2013.

This comes in spite of several shortcomings in his six-year care being highlighted.

She said the probe, published by London-based Verita, tries to discredit her son by drawing heavily upon the fact he turned to drink in the 12 months before he died.

Giving an emotional address to trust bosses, when the investigation was discussed, Mrs Ankrett, from Bloxwich, said she would now pursue a private report.

She said chief executive Richard Kirby and medical director Amir Khan should resign immediately, over their handling of an earlier review into Mark's case stating claiming they did not communicate properly with each other.

Mr Kirby said: "I suspect

Report by Carl Jackson

there is little I will be able to say that will directly help Mr and Mrs Ankrett given the anxiety, distress, the additional strain that the way we tried to respond to the complaint has caused for them.

"For me both personally and officially I would like to apologise for the failings in care we provided. There were failings both in the elements of care and also in the response to concerns when they were raised.

"We weren't quick enough. We have tried hard since to make sure we don't find ourselves in this position again. I am personally sorry for my part in the response." Mr Khan also offered a personal apology.

These 'spirits' we could do without!

Jack Webb in the haunted cellars in the building next to the Dog and Doublet in Wolverhampton

IT looks like something out of a horror film, but this is the interior of a well-known pub that is soon to welcome a vicar to rid it of ghostly spirits.

New owners of the former Little Civic in Wolverhampton city centre have described how staff have witnessed spooky goings-on in the cellar and tunnels under the property.

Now, they are looking to get a vicar in to expel the ghosts so that further transformation of the venue can continue. The venue is being transformed by the owners of the neighbouring Dog and Doublet, who use the same underground stores.

Jack Webb, bar manager, said: "I've been here for a couple of years now and so many members of staff have reported the same things happening.

"Myself, I was on a ladder down there and I heard someone call out 'Mama'. It was such a weird moment because I definitely heard it. And yet no-one was there."

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Fitting final farewell for Burma Star veteran, 94

THERE was an emotional final farewell to 94-year-old Burma Star veteran Howard Beech.

Members of the Burma Star Association turned out to pay their respects.

Family and friends also gathered at the intimate service on Friday to pay tribute to Mr Beech at St Leonard's Church in Bilston.

The veteran fought as part of the Burma campaign, which took place between 1944 and 1945. It saw conflict between the British and Imperial Japan, Thailand and the Indian National Army.

Among those paying their respects were grandchildren Alex, Sarah, Lyndsey and Loyd, and nephew Keith Beech at the service.

Keith, 77, said: "It was absolutely stunning, proper military, a proper job. He's like a second dad to me, he was a lovely man and he deserved every second of today.

"The whole day, what a lovely day, we shouldn't forget our soldiers should we.

"The whole family were absolutely chuffed. It was really, very nice.

Born on November 16, 1922, in Bilston, Mr Beech later married Zelma, his wife of more than 60 years.

Upon arriving back from war to Wolverhampton, he was admitted to hospital for shell shock as he could not Like many others returning from the horror's of the Burma conflict, he was suffering heavily and wasn't able to remember the boat ride back from Vietnam.

Mr Beech said: "He was deployed to Vietnam, and he was deployed on artillery practice with the 4th regiment.

"He had a really, really rough time over there. He served with the 114th Jungle Field Regiment Royal Artillery.

"I was very, very close with Howard."

Leading the service, Reverend Prentice said: "Today we have come to remember Howard and to give thanks.

"We're here to honour someone who lived his life to the full.

"He loved his football, he was a Wolves fan.

"He would speak his mind if he had to, he didn't suffer fools."

As part of a written tribute, son Paul's note read: "We were hoping he would make it to a 100 but sadly this was not to be.

Howard passed away very unexpectedly exactly two years to the time and day that his wife passed.

Howard Beech died aged 94

Bugle: Jim Cornes

St Leonard's Church, Bilston, the funeral of veteran Howard Beech

Fans' version of events are put on iPlayer

THE dramatic collection of stories told by Aston Villa, Baggies and Birmingham City fans in the stage production Stadium can now be watched for free on the BBC iPlayer.

A star of the show, which ran at the Birmingham Rep earlier in the year, was fundraiser Blind Dave Heeley.

Described as 'the drama of theatre meets the thrill of football', Stadium features real stories and memories from fans from across the Midlands footballing spectrum. There is footage of interviews, insights, music and songs from fans and inspirational supporters as well as some match action.

Also live testimonies from devoted supporters including Baggies fan Dave. Among the highlights are a bagpiper who has played at hundreds of matches and the bride who got married in the colours of her beloved Blues and the Villa Rockets Powerchair football team.

Talking about his role during the theatre run Dave said: "The story is primarily about Blues and Villa fans, I think they've thrown me into the mix for a bit of Premier League class.

"I couldn't do this as a profession though – you're on for three minutes, then you're waiting about for three hours."

Stadium is available to view on BBC iPlayer until September 6 at http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p05939yf/stadium

Warehouse scheme prompts site visit

COUNCILLORS are to visit a warehouse to decide whether it should be allowed to be turned into shared housing.

An application has been lodged with Sandwell Council to convert the unit, on Pennant Road, Cradley Heath, into a house of multiple occupation, featuring 20 rooms.

Reel life for amazing Dave

"STUFF like this doesn't happen to us lads in West Bromwich." That is how legendary fundraiser Blind Dave Heeley summed up his thoughts about the movie which is being made about his life.

The man himself says he is 'pinching himself' about his journey featuring on the silver screen. He is the first blind man to complete seven marathons in seven continents in seven days, and has also finished the gruelling Escape from Alcatraz swim. In 2011, Blind Dave ran 10 marathons in 10 days from John O'Groats to Land's End.

He also took part in a 700-mile week-long bike ride between Zurich and Birmingham in 2012.

Currently, he is in the middle of finishing each of the 25 (check) Great Run events in a year.

The 40-minute film about his life – entitled 7 Days – will be released later this year. The 59-year-old said: "I feel quite privileged and also very proud that somebody wants to do it.

Excited

"When the book came out I still didn't really believe I'd had a book published and what had happened in my life was between the covers.

"Stuff like this doesn't happen to us lads in West Bromwich.

"After the book a few people came up to me and said 'we've got to get a film done'. Then Nigel got this production company involved, they read up on me and it went from there. When they told me what they were planning to do I was left with an open mouth – thinking 'this doesn't happen to people like me'. I'm quite excited for it. To be honest I think it's absolutely bloody fantastic.

"The support I've had from a lot of people in recent times – including the Baggies, where I've been on the pitch and got the Freedom of The Hawthorns – has been unbelievable."

A film poster to promote the film

Dave seen when he brought out his autobiography

Fellow adventurer Sir Ranulph Fiennes with Dave

A proud moment for Dave as Olympic torch bearer

The film, called 7 Days, will be about 40 minutes long so it can be shown at specific movie festivals. But the producers said they are hopeful that if it gets a positive response then it could be turned into a feature film.

Blind Dave said: "It's going to be a short film and hopefully it gets the message across to people that anything is possible.

"It will focus on me doing the seven marathons but also have flashbacks to when I was younger and losing my sight.

"I think the way they are planning to do it will be very powerful. Hopefully it should inspire people.

"I'm still pinching myself about the book – now I'm pinching myself about this film.

"With it being 40 minutes or so they will be able to put it in certain film festivals but they hope if there's a good response it may attract funding so they could do a feature film."

Blind Dave joked that Brad Pitt 'wasn't good looking enough' to be cast as the Baggies fan in the feature.

Sir Ranulph Fiennes, the man dubbed 'the world's greatest living explorer, said: "I was very pleased to hear a film project about Blind Dave Heeley is going to be made.

"He is an inspirational athlete and gentleman – I look forward to seeing it."

Former Aston Villa owner Sir Doug Ellis, who is an executive producer on the film, said: "I was glad to support this film about Blind Dave Heeley.

"It will inspire many. His story will show it's not about what you can't do – it's about what you can do."

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Raise Your Glass as Pink heads to

The big decision for headliner Pink won't be what to include in her main stage set at V. It'll be what to leave out.

The seller of around 50 million albums and winner of three Grammys, one Brit, a Daytime Emmy and six MTV Video Music Awards has been working on her upcoming seventh album, Beautiful Trauma, which is out in October.

And when it comes to choosing her set list, she'll have to choose from six albums and 35 singles.

The hit-maker has scored some of the most important singles of the 2000s, including Get The Party Started, Who Knew, So What, Raise Your Glass, Perfect, Try, Just Give Me A Reason and Just Like Fire.

She has become increasingly successful throughout her career and her most recent studio album, The Truth About Love, was a number one in the USA, Canada, across Europe and in New Zealand.

It was released five years ago and looked at love, relationships, feminism, sexual prowess and social exclusion. She collaborated with Eminem, Lily Allen and Nate Ruess, from American band Fun.

A huge world tour followed, taking Pink through America, Australia and Europe.

She has since had a second child, a son, Jameson, to go with her daughter, Willow, and enjoyed time at home with her husband, Carey Hart, the professional motocross racer.

The singer, described as the most trailblazing artist of her generation, lists Madonna and Janis Joplin as her two biggest heroes and she in turn has inspired Katy Perry, Kesha and Rihanna.

She has also acquired a new hobby, cultivating an organic vineyard in southern California after visiting leading wineries around the world. She describes her passion for wine as her 'dirty little secret' and says she started by taking online courses.

After that, she learned about pruning vines by taking her Beck album, listening to it through earphones and spending days pruning. Pink says she loved the ability to work for eight hours with nature and pruning quickly became her favourite thing.

She developed her 25-acre estate, which includes Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Malbec, Grenache and Grenache Blanc. Her love of wine, however, has been a long-term thing. When she burst onto the scene at the end of the 1990s, her rider would include a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

She told Decanter magazine: "When I made my [first] rider, I was 20 and I just put Châteauneuf-du-Pape on there because that was the wine that made me love wine."

Since then, when she's been travelling the world, she's visited some of the best wineries that there are. She admits she doesn't know too much about English wine – but is hoping to try a little after she headlines V.

Earlier this year, Pink teamed up with Sia to release a new song, Waterfall. They worked with Norwegian songwriters Stargate on the track. Stargate have previously written hits for Beyonce, Rihanna and Fifth Harmony.

Time to think Pink as the US superstar headlines one of the top festivals

Pink works hard to stay out of the Hollywood bubble and she has been a formidable campaigner for women's rights. On social media and in interviews, she has lashed out at body shamers and lambasted those who are judgemental about women's figures.

At the BMI Pop Awards, she said: "I don't take well to bullying. I never have. I'm not a person that will be bullied. I'm not a person that will stand by watching other people bullied.

"I am a girl, I have feelings and people think I take no sh*t and I'm tough, tougher than nails, but I'm a human being.

"I think people have gotten it wrong. They think their opinion matters and holds weight and I don't know where or why they're giving themselves so much credit, you know?

"So I thought it was important for me to remind them that I don't care. My life is full, I like food a lot and I really like to cook, I like to live, I find joy in that and were doing alright in the Hart household."

Pink has been lauded by critics for being that rarest of creatures – a true artist.

While other stars have been criticised for oversinging, being unable to sing or being vocal lightweights, Pink has maintained a brilliant career by being an authentic, powerhouse vocalist. One of the singers on whom she had the greatest impact was Adele, who saw her as a teenager on the Missundaztood tour, at Brixton Academy. Adele rated it as one of the defining moments of her life and said: "I had never heard, being in the room, someone sing like that live. I remember sort of feeling like I was in a wind tunnel, her voice just hitting me. It was incredible."

> *People think I take no sh*t and I'm tough, but I'm a human being*

SUPERBOWL

Adele isn't the only one to credit Pink's work as being inspirational – she's also loved by Demi Lovato, Kelly Clarkson, Taylor Swift and more.

Pink has also rushed to the defence of other female stars, including Lady Gaga who was criticised for copying her Superbowl performance by 'flying' through the air.

She took to Instagram using the hashtag #womensupportingwomen to support Lady Gaga and wrote: "Her voice was powerful and beautiful, her outfits were on point, choreography stellar, her heart was in it and she sang about love and inclusiveness, all in front of millions and millions of people."

Pink will be doing something similar this weekend – her fans can't wait.

● **For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.**

The animals - a not-so-subtle clue to the title of the band's biggest hit The Size of a Cow

Booking in to relive those Wonder years

SOLD out football stadia and number one hits – for a while, The Wonder Stuff became the region's biggest musical export since Slade and Led Zeppelin.

Led by the tousle-haired Miles Hunt, The Eight Legged Groove Machine became Top of the Pops habitués as they escaped their native Stourbridge and took on the world. Hunt, who for 22 years has lived in the Shropshire Hills, wrote instantly accessible songs that resonated with indie kids around the UK.

And though their first two albums were successful – The Eight Legged Groove Machine went to number 18 on the chart while Hup went to number five – it was their latter years, from 1990 to 1994, that brought them their greatest commercial success.

Their third album, Never Loved Elvis, was a number three hit and spawned the top five single Size Of A Cow while the successor, Construction For The Modern Idiot, also hit number four on the chart in 1993.

Successful albums weren't the only way of calibrating their success. The Wonder Stuff also filled Walsall's Bescot Stadium, packing 18,000 'Stuffies' into their local football club.

When they'd finally had enough, they did so in style. As they headlined a sold out Phoenix Festival with actress Anna Friel looking on, there were echoes of a lyric from the song Here Comes Everyone, which featured on Never Loved Elvis.

While The Wonder Stuff's 1990-1994 era coincided with their most successful age, it was also Hunt's unhappiest in the band. "I didn't enjoy any of it," he says.

Two years ago, Hunt chronicled The Wonder Stuff's early years in his book The Wonder Stuff Diaries '86-'89. In August, Hunt will publish the two compendium volumes, the first covering the years '90-'91 and the second covering the band's exit, '92-'94.

In '90-'91, Hunt picks up where he left off. Having lost an original member, Rob 'The Bass Thing' Jones, at the end of 1989 Hunt recalls the subsequent months pondering how the band might recover from such a blow.

Hunt says: "If my first book of diaries represented the ascent of The Wonder Stuff then this book represents the levelling out, the getting used to how things are going to be from here on in."

The latter book marks an era in which the band were enormously successful – but remarkably dysfunctional and unhappy. Hunt doesn't hide his disaffection with the band.

He says: "No matter how many records an artist sells it will never sate the hunger of the business end of the music business. It's a dreary environment for a creative person to find him or herself in and it would've took a much smarter person than I was back in the early 1990's to have got the balance right."

Hunt's life between 1990 and 1994 was utterly extraordinary. Having grown up and been inspired by his uncle, Bill, who was the keyboard player in ELO and Wizzard, he moved to Stourbridge at the age of 18 or 19 and hung out with mates who later formed Pop Will Eat Itself. The rest, as his diaries attest, is history. The diaries, collectively, chart The Wonder Stuff's remarkable rise.

ANDY RICHARDSON

The Wonder Stuff filled Walsall's Bescot Stadium

Miles Hunt at the Literary Festival in Wolverhampton

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SATURDAY'S TV AUGUST 19

CHOICE

Len Goodman

Len Goodman's Partners in Rhyme
(Channel 4, 9pm)
New series. The former Strictly Come Dancing judge hosts a lyrical game show, in which two would-be poets battle it out through three rhyme-based challenges in a bid to claim a place in the final round, where they could win a holiday. Each competitor receives help from two celebrity assistants, who are on hand to back-up their assigned contestant in a variety of themed tasks.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Nadiya's British Food Adventure. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **2.15** Money for Nothing. (R) **3.15** Escape to the Country. (R) **4.00** Final Score. **5.15 Film:** Toy Story. (1995) Pixar animated adventure, with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen.
6.30 BBC News.
6.40 Regional Programme.
6.45 Len Goodman's Partners in Rhyme. New series. The former Strictly Come Dancing judge hosts a lyrical game show, in two teams of celebrities help a pair of would-be poets battle through four rhyme-based challenges.
7.20 Pointless Celebrities. David Coulthard, Mark Webber, Allan McNish, Claire Williams, Murray Walker, Nigel Mansell, Christian Horner and Suzi Perry take part in a Formula One-themed edition of the quiz. (R)
8.05 Who Dares Wins.
8.45 Casualty. Medics from Holby head for France to offer their expertise to migrants stranded at a refugee camp. There, Alicia takes a shine to British medic Cameron Hamilton, who has been on the scene for a while, helping the camp's women and children. Meanwhile, Dylan finds himself becoming emotionally involved in the plight of two Sudanese orphans, who have fallen prey to ruthless people-traffickers, and back at the hospital, Connie is shocked to learn Sam has resigned and seems to have disappeared – taking Grace with him.
9.35 Mrs Brown's Boys. Agnes ends up at the wrong venue after trying to gatecrash Maria's hen party. She then tries to impress the bride-to-be's mother during a dinner date, but the evening ends in chaos. (R)
10.05 BBC News; Weather.; National Lottery Update.
10.25 Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents highlights from the latest Premier League.
11.50 People Just Do Nothing. New series. The spoof documentary going behind the scenes at pirate radio station Kurupt FM returns, as a rival station emerges, and Grindah spirals out of control.
12.20 Film: Tron: Legacy. (2010) **2.15** Weather for the Week Ahead.

BBC2

6.00 Coast. (R) **7.00 Film:** Return of the Bad Men. (1948) **8.30 Film:** Great Day in the Morning. (1956) **10.00** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **11.00** Ulster Derby Highlights. **12.00** Nigel and Adam's Farm Kitchen. (R) **1.00** Wanted Down Under. (R) **1.45 Film:** Forbidden Planet. (1956) Sci-fi drama, starring Walter Pidgeon. **3.20** Mastermind. (R) **3.50** University Challenge. (R) **4.20** Only Connect. (R) **4.50** Gardeners' World. (R) **5.50** The Big Family Cooking Showdown. (R)
6.50 Proms Extra. Baritone singer Roderick Williams and composer Hannah Kendall join host Katie Derham in the studio. Tonight, she revisits Rachmaninov's Symphony No 2 in E minor, which the Scottish Symphony Orchestra performed as part of Prom 37 last Sunday, and the Aurora Orchestra's rendition of Beethoven's Eroica from Prom 10. Also featured is Prom 41's Passages, by Ravi Shankar and Philip Glass, performed by the Britten Sinfonia and Karen Kamensek alongside Shankar's daughter, the sitar virtuoso Anoushka Shankar.
7.30 Welcome to Edinburgh.
8.00 Iolo's Great Welsh Parks. Iolo Williams explores Margam Country Park on the outskirts of Port Talbot, which feature lakes and mature woodland with three species of deer and 11 species of bats.
8.30 Dad's Army. Captain Mainwaring devises a cunning new way of foiling Hitler's invasion plans – but it results in Pike getting trapped in the middle of a minefield. (R)
9.00 Film: The Lady in the Van. (2015) The true story of writer Alan Bennett's friendship with an eccentric homeless woman, whom he befriended in the 1970s before allowing her to park her dilapidated Bedford van outside his Camden home, where she ended up staying for 15 years. Comedy-drama, starring Maggie Smith.
10.40 Being Alan Bennett. Cameras follow the author during key moments of his 75th year, revealing the apparent contradictions in his personality as he performs civic functions and prepares his new play. (R)
11.40 Film: The History Boys. (2006) Comedy drama, with Richard Griffiths.
1.30 Film: Henry V. (1989)

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Sooty. (R) **6.30** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Oddbods. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Super 4. (R) **7.25** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **7.40** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **8.25** ITV News. **8.30** Weekend. **9.25** Judge Rinder. (R) **10.20** Gok's Lunchbox. (R) **11.15** 1000 Heartbeats. (R) **12.15** ITV News; Weather. **12.25** The Chase. (R) **1.25** Joanna Lumley's Postcards. (R) **1.55** Tipping Point. (R) **3.00** Midsomer Murders. (R) **5.00** Little Big Shots USA.
6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.
6.05 ITV News; Weather.
6.20 You've Been Framed! Bounces Back! Harry Hill narrates another 60-minute special edition of the comical clip show, applying his unique brand of silly, satirical commentary to a selection of hilarious hi-jinks captured on video by viewers at home. (R)
7.15 Catchphrase. Stephen Mulhern hosts the game show, asking three contestants to "see it and say it" as they try to guess the familiar phrases hidden in animated clues. After the first elimination, the two remaining players battle to reach the Super Catchphrase round, where one of them could win £50,000. Last in the series.
8.00 Film: The Amazing Spider-Man. (2012) A gifted teenager investigates the secrets hidden in his dead parents' past, leading him to a mysterious corporation and an incident that imbues him with superhuman powers. A personal tragedy drives him to use his new-found abilities to fight crime, and he is soon drawn into a deadly battle against a former colleague of his father, who has undergone a devastating transformation of his own. Superhero adventure reboot, starring Andrew Garfield, Emma Stone and Rhys Ifans.
10.35 ITV News; Weather.
10.50 Film: The World Is Not Enough. (1999) James Bond is assigned to protect an oil heiress from an infamous terrorist planning to destroy a pipeline. Spy adventure, with Pierce Brosnan, Robert Carlyle and Sophie Marceau.
1.10 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 Motor Sport: Mini Challenge. **6.45** Triathlon: Long Course Weekend. **7.40** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.05** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.25** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.55** The Simpsons. (R) **11.25** The Simpsons. (R) **11.55** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **12.50** Four in a Bed. (R) **1.25** Four in a Bed. (R) **1.55** Four in a Bed. (R) **2.30** Four in a Bed. (R) **3.00** Four in a Bed. (R) **3.35** A Place in the Sun: Winter Sun. (R) **4.35** Big House, Little House. **5.35** Kirstie and Phil's Love It or List It. (R)
6.30 Channel 4 News.
7.00 Britain at Low Tide. Last in the series. (R)
8.00 Child Genius: The Final. Richard Osman hosts the final stage of the week-long contest, once again serving as quizmaster as five of Britain's brightest young minds battle it out to enter the final round, and secure a chance at the title. The first part of the final sees the contestants demonstrating their mastery of a degree-level specialist subject of their choice. The subjects are Edward Jenner: Medical Innovation and Methodology in the late 18th Century, Pre-Socratic Philosophy, Military Campaigns of the Yellow Turban Rebellion – 184-205CE, Martin Luther King Jr, and London in 1666: Society, Politics and the Urban Environment in the Year of the Great Fire. Only the two highest scoring competitors from the specialist round will make it through to the last, head-to-head buzzer contest, which will result in one youngster claiming the title of Child Genius 2017. Last in the series.
9.00 Film: The Hunger Games: Catching Fire. (2013) Sci-fi adventure sequel based on the second book in Suzanne Collins' trilogy of novels, starring Jennifer Lawrence, Liam Hemsworth and Donald Sutherland.
11.50 Film: X-Men. (2000) Mutant outsiders with strange powers fight to defend mankind from a superhuman terrorist faction. Sci-fi comic-book adventure, starring Hugh Jackman.
1.35 The Windsors. (R) **2.05** Hollyoaks. **4.10** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.05** Sarah Beeny's Double Your House for Half the Money. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.25** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.50 Film:** Igor. (2008) **12.25** Disobedient Dogs Make You Laugh Out Loud. (R) **1.20** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun. (R) **2.20** Bargain-Loving Brits in the Sun. (R) **3.15** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords. (R) **4.15** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords. (R) **5.10** The Nightmare Neighbour Next Door. (R)
6.05 The Nightmare Neighbour Next Door. A Devon woman spends a night in the cells after a dispute with a neighbour who happens to be a policeman, while a York man gets an unexpected soaking after an argument. (R)
7.00 Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. Paul Bohill and Phil Short must deal with a negligent tenant who fled upon their arrival, forcing the agents to set a trap in order to evict him. Meanwhile, Brian O'Shaughnessy and Kevin Stokes chase a debt of £5,000 in Kent, before heading to Surrey to recover £11,000 owed by the owner a bespoke furniture business. Plus, Paul and Steve Pinner's patience is tested to the limit when they are sent to carry out an eviction in London. (R)
8.00 Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. Agents Stewart and Elmore face the most challenging eviction of their careers, while Brian and Del chase £2,000 worth of debt owed by a business based in Kent. (R)
8.55 5 News Weekend.
9.00 Football on 5: The Championship. Highlights from the latest games in the Championship, which included Sheffield United v Barnsley, Aston Villa v Norwich City, and Sunderland v Leeds United.
10.00 Football on 5: Goal Rush. Goals from the weekend's games in Leagues One and Two, which included Bradford City v Blackburn Rovers, and Forest Green Rovers v Yeovil Town.
10.30 Celebrity Big Brother. Highlights from Friday, including the contestants' reactions to the eviction, plus more games, gossip and diary room confessions.
11.30 Lip Sync Battle UK: Rufus Hound v Jorgie Porter. (R)
12.00 Cricket on 5. **1.00** SuperCasino. **3.10** Gotham. (R) **4.00** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords. (R) **4.45** Access. **4.55** Great Scientists. (R) **5.25** Nick's Quest. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 The Brain with David Eagleman **8.00** Fossil Wonderlands: Nature's Hidden Treasures **9.00** Inspector Montalbano **10.55** Bob Monkhouse: The Last Stand **12.00** The Secret Life of Bob Monkhouse **1.25** David Bowie and the Story of Ziggy Stardust **2.30** Fossil Wonderlands: Nature's Hidden Treasures **3.30** Close

ITV2
11.40 Catchphrase **12.25** Harry Hill's Alien Fun Capsule **12.55** You've Been Framed! Gold **1.20** You've Been Framed! Goes Wild! **2.25 Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **3.25** FYI Daily **3.30 Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **4.15 Film:** St Trinian's (2007) **5.15** FYI Daily **5.20 Film:** St Trinian's (2007) **6.10 Film:** Hotel Transylvania (2012) **7.10** FYI Daily **7.15 Film:** Hotel Transylvania (2012) **8.00 Film:** Crazy, Stupid, Love (2011) **9.05** FYI Daily **9.10 Film:** Crazy, Stupid, Love (2011) **10.20** Family Guy **12.20** American Dad! **1.20** The Keith Lemon Sketch Show **2.10** Viral Tap **2.50** Teleshopping **5.50** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3
1.00 The Darling Buds of May **2.05** Agatha Christie's Marple **4.05 Film:** Carry On Camping (1969) **5.05** FYI Daily **5.10 Film:** Carry On Camping (1969) **5.55** Wycliffe **7.00** Agatha Christie's Marple **9.00** Foyle's War **11.00** Law & Order: UK **1.55** Rising Damp

ITV4
11.00 Cash Cowboys **1.00** Storage Wars **1.30** ITV Racing: Live from Newbury, Newmarket and Ripon. Oli Bell and Francesca Cumani present coverage of today's meetings. **4.00** British Touring Car Championship Highlights **5.30** Storage Wars **6.00** World Series of Darts: Melbourne **10.00** Cycling: Vuelta a Espana **11.05 Film:** Blade (1998) **12.05** FYI Daily **12.10 Film:** Blade (1998)

E4
12.15 Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **12.30** The Goldbergs **3.00** The Big Bang Theory **5.30** Don't Tell the Bride **6.30 Film:** Beautiful Creatures (2013) **9.00 Film:** I Give It a Year (2013) **11.00** Gogglebox **1.05** Rude Tube: All Things Weird and Wonderful **2.15** Tattoo Fixers

Film4
11.00 Sunshine on Leith (2013) **1.00** Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2010) **2.50** Epic (2013) **4.55** Carry On Teacher (1959) **6.40** The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013) **8.55** Patti Cake$ Interview Special **9.00** I, Frankenstein (2014) **10.45** Attack the Block (2011) **12.30** The Windmill Massacre (2016)

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SUNDAY'S TV AUGUST 20

CHOICE

Sam Otto

The State (Channel 4, 9pm)
New series. Drama following the experiences of four British men and women who left their lives behind to join Isis in 2015. A man hoping to follow in his brother's footsteps has persuaded his best friend to join him, while a single mother hopes to provide medical aid and a teenager embraces the radical doctrines she has encountered online. The recruits cross into Syria under cover of darkness, where the men begin combat training and the women are introduced to the society's strict rules. Continues tomorrow.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.35** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** BBC News. **10.00** Sunday Morning Live. **11.00** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **12.00** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Money for Nothing. (R) **2.15** Songs of Praise. **2.50** Athletics: Birmingham Grand Prix. Live coverage of the ninth round of the Diamond League season. **5.10** Celebrity Mastermind. (R) **5.40** BBC News. **5.55** Regional Programme.

6.05 Countryfile. Summer special from the Blenheim Estate in Oxfordshire. Ellie Harrison meets an aspiring actress-turned-accidental cow artist, John Craven uncovers one of the house's greatest secrets, Adam Henson brings the farmyard to the showground, and Tom Heap discovers how the estate's forests help the local community.

7.05 Fake or Fortune? New series. Fiona Bruce and art expert Philip Mould investigate a landscape that may be a lost painting by Constable, and an alternate view of his masterpiece The Hay Wain. The painting is currently owned by a Gloucestershire businessman and seems to have all the hallmarks of Constable's early sketches, as well as clear signs that it depicts the same location as The Hay Wain – but was dismissed as another artist's work 30 years previously. The case proves particularly personal for Philip, who is one of the artwork's previous owners.

8.05 Film: Far from the Madding Crowd. (2015) Premiere. A headstrong Victorian woman inherits a sheep farm in a remote area of Dorset. She struggles to maintain her independence while being courted by three very different men – a stoic farmer, a dashing, reckless soldier and a lonely older man. Period drama based on Thomas Hardy's novel, starring Carey Mulligan, Matthias Schoenaerts, Tom Sturridge and Michael Sheen.

10.00 BBC News.

10.20 Regional Programme.

10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the latest Premier League action.

11.30 Film: Dream House. (2011) Horror, starring Daniel Craig, Naomi Watts and Rachel Weisz.

12.55 Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.00** BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 The Instant Gardener. (R) **7.00** Garden Rescue. (R) **7.45** Gardeners' World. (R) **8.45** The Beechgrove Garden. **9.15** Countryfile. (R) **10.15** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.45** Lorraine's Fast, Fresh and Easy Food. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** The Hairy Bikers' Pubs That Built Britain. (R) **1.30** Athletics: Birmingham Grand Prix. Live coverage of the ninth round of the Diamond League season. **2.50** Flog It! (R) **3.45** Britain's Ancient Capital: Secrets of Orkney. (R) **4.45** Equestrian.

6.50 Tribes, Predators & Me. Gordon Buchanan travels to remote regions on three continents to learn how tribal cultures hunt and live alongside dangerous animals, beginning his journey in Ecuador, where he meets a family from the Waorani tribe. They venture into the Amazon Jungle, where the Waorani hunt monkeys and wild pigs using blowpipes and sharpened sticks, and try to trap an anaconda, an animal of great spiritual significance. (R)

7.50 Meet the New Dragons. An introduction to Dragons' Den's new panellists, Tej Lalvani, CEO of vitamins company Vitabiotics, and Jenny Campbell, founder of ATM provider YourCash Europe Ltd.

8.00 Dragons' Den. New series. Evan Davis hosts the business ideas challenge, which sees vitamin company CEO Tej Lalvani and cash machine tycoon Jenny Campbell joining returning Dragons Deborah Meaden, Peter Jones and Touker Suleyman to cast an eye over more money-making schemes – with the largest investments in the show's history up for grabs. The first batch of entrepreneurs braving the den present their ideas for an allergy-friendly food range, astroturf for schools and youth centres, and a voucher code website that could revolutionise online shopping.

9.00 Astronauts: Do You Have What it Takes? New series. A group of 12 people compete against each other through six weeks of astronaut training, with the winner receiving support in pursuing a career with a space agency.

10.00 Ill Behaviour. New series. Starring Chris Geere.

11.00 Film: The Hunter. (2011) Drama, starring Willem Dafoe.

12.35 Film: Tommy. (1975) **2.10** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R)

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Sooty. (R) **6.30** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.50** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Oddbods. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.15** Super 4. (R) **7.30** Ninjago: Rebooted. (R) **8.00** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **8.25** ITV News. **8.30** Weekend. **9.25** Judge Rinder. (R) **10.20** Long Lost Family. (R) **11.20** Love Your Garden. (R) **12.20** ITV News; Weather. **12.25** James Martin's French Adventure. (R) **1.00** Rebound. (R) **1.55** Tipping Point. (R) **2.55** Bear Grylls Survival School. (R) **3.25 Film:** Licence to Kill. (1989) James Bond spy thriller, starring Timothy Dalton.

6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.10 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 The Chase Celebrity Special. Bradley Walsh presents as celebrity contestants Jay Rayner, Lucy Porter, Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Steve Davis pit their wits against ruthless quiz genius the Chaser in the hope of winning a potential prize pot worth thousands of pounds. They must work as a team and play strategically to answer general knowledge questions against the clock and race down the game board to the exit without being caught.

7.30 Film: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2. (2011) The young wizard continues his search for the artefacts containing fragments of the dark lord Voldemort's soul. Time is running out, as the evil sorcerer is aware of Harry's mission, and marshals his forces for a final, devastating attack on Harry and his friends at Hogwarts school. Conclusion of the fantasy saga, with Daniel Radcliffe, Ralph Fiennes, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson and Alan Rickman.

10.00 ITV News; Weather.

10.15 Judge Rinder's Crime Stories. Barrister Robert Rinder examines the case of murderer Kenneth Noye, who was the target of an international manhunt after stabbing a man to death on the M25. (R)

11.15 Take Me Out. (R)

12.35 Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.00 Last Man Standing. **6.25** Last Man Standing. **6.50** Last Man Standing. **7.10** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Frasier. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** George Clarke's Amazing Spaces. (R) **1.35** The Simpsons. (R) **2.05** The Simpsons. (R) **2.35** The Simpsons. (R) **3.05** The Simpsons. (R) **3.35** Toy Story Toons. (R) **4.05 Film:** Toy Story That Time Forgot. (2014) Short animated comedy, with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen. **4.30 Film:** Tangled. (2010) Disney animated comedy, with the voice of Mandy Moore.

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Amazing Spaces Shed of the Year. New series. George Clarke presides over the 2017 Shed of the Year competition, beginning with the cabins and summerhouses category. Among the contenders are a mushroom-shaped shed and a pink and turquoise construction inspired by a Los Angeles pool house. This year's contest will feature a new category, for unusual sheds that push the boundaries of construction in ingenious ways.

8.00 From Russia to Iran: Crossing the Wild Frontier. New series. Levison Wood travels across the Caucasus mountain range, which run for 2600 miles across five countries on the border between Europe and Asia. The expedition begins on Russia's heavily militarised southern border, where he has to avoid the local police. The first leg of the journey takes him through the ruins of ancient civilisations, the notorious former battleground of Chechnya, and the territory of Islamist terrorists.

9.00 The State. New series. Drama following the experiences of four British men and women who left their lives behind to join Isis in 2015. The recruits cross into Syria under cover of darkness. Continues tomorrow.

10.00 Film: The Gunman. (2015) After spending years in hiding, a mercenary becomes the latest target of his former colleagues. Crime drama, starring Sean Penn and Idris Elba.

12.10 Film: Belle. (2013) **2.00** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA. (R) **2.50** Gillette World Sport. **3.20** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **3.50** Location, Location, Location. (R) **4.45** Sarah Beeny's Double Your House for Half the Money. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Poppy Cat. **6.10** Little Princess. (R) **6.25** Mr Men. (R) **6.35** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.45** Simon. (R) **6.50** Peppa Pig. (R) **6.55** Wissper. (R) **7.05** Bob the Builder. (R) **7.15** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.25** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.30** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.50** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.20** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **8.35** Floogals. (R) **8.50** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.10** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.25** Digby Dragon. (R) **9.40** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.45** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **10.00** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **10.15** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.40** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.30** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **12.00** Police Interceptors. (R) **1.00** Police Interceptors: Dog Squad Special. (R) **2.00** Police Interceptors: Deadly Pursuits. (R) **3.00** Police Interceptors: Deadly Pursuits 2. (R) **3.55** Police Interceptors: Drugs Bust. (R) **4.55** 5 News Weekend. **5.00** Biggest Dog in the World. (R)

6.00 The Secret Life of Puppies: Terrible Twos. Part one of two. The return of the documentary following the early stages of dogs' lives. An English bulldog is piling on the pounds and is given a new exercise regimen. (R)

6.45 The Secret Life of Puppies: Terrible Twos. Part two of two. Big Ron makes big progress with his weight-loss programme, while eight-month-old French Bulldog Betsy turns her hand to doggy modelling. (R)

7.30 The Ant & Dec Story. Documentary celebrating much-loved duo Anthony McPartlin and Declan Donnelly, who in a career already spanning more than 25 years, have conquered almost every part of the TV schedules, from anarchic children's programmes to some of the biggest shows, including the Queen's recent birthday celebrations. Contributors include friends, fans and some of the celebrities who have fallen foul of the duo's trademark tricks, or actually found fame through their formats. (R)

9.00 Celebrity Big Brother.

10.05 Before They Were Stars. Dale Winton treks back through the TV archive to uncover embarrassing early brushes with fame endured by some of today's biggest stars.

12.05 Cricket on 5. **1.00** SuperCasino. **3.10** Gotham. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Do We Really Need the Moon? **8.00** BBC Proms 2017 **10.40** The Treasure Hunters **12.40** James May at the Edge of Space **1.10** The Rules of Abstraction with Matthew Collings **2.40** The Art of Australia **3.40** Close

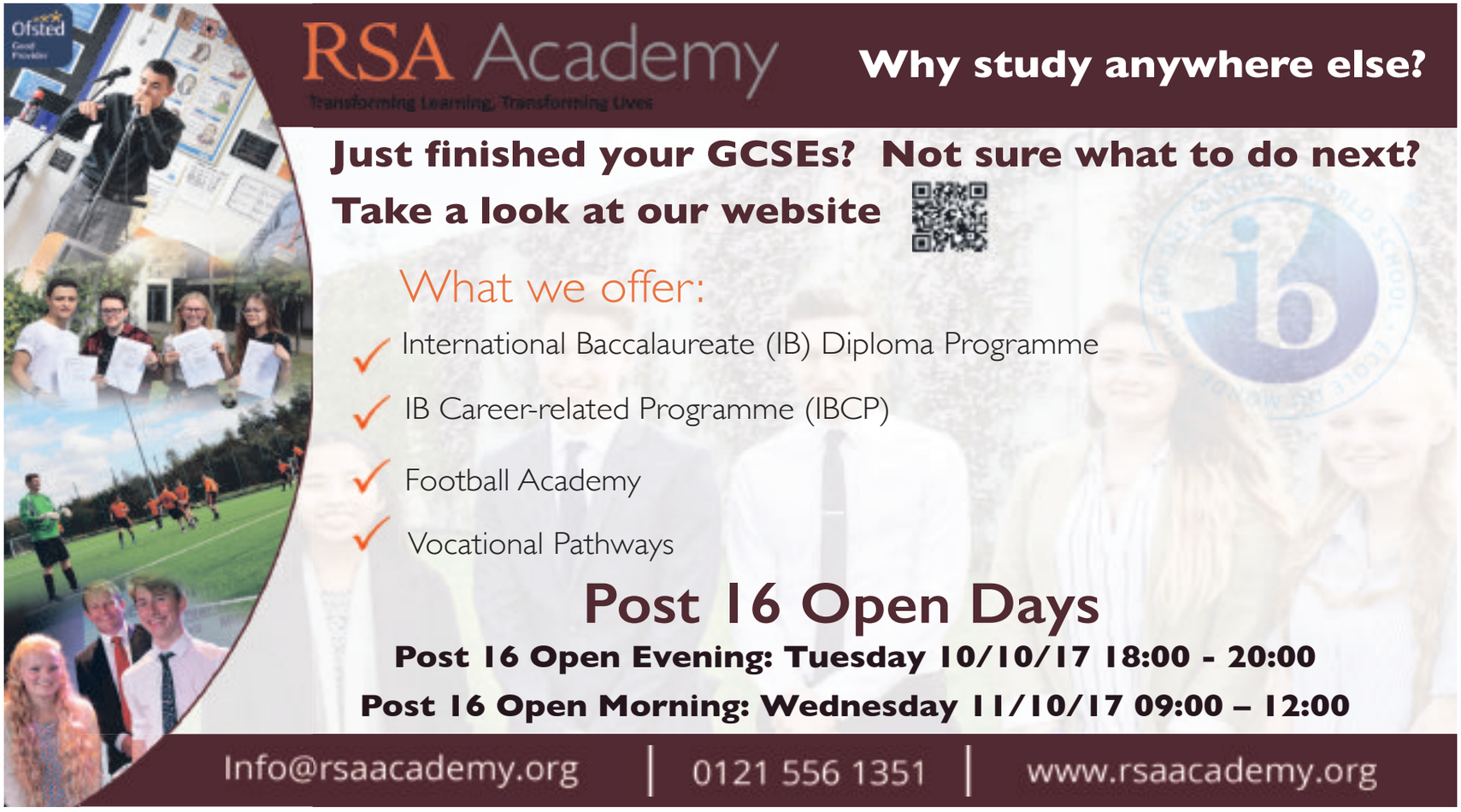
ITV2
11.55 Ninja Warrior UK **1.00** Mr Bean **2.05 Film:** Honey (2003) **3.05** FYI Daily **3.10 Film:** Honey (2003) **4.00 Film:** Looney Tunes: Back in Action (2003) **5.00** FYI Daily **5.05 Film:** Looney Tunes: Back in Action (2003) **5.50 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **6.50** FYI Daily **6.55 Film:** Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang (2010) **8.00 Film:** The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **9.00** FYI Daily **9.05 Film:** The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift (2006) **10.05** Family Guy **12.00** American Dad! **12.55** The Cleveland Show **1.50** Viral Tap **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV3
11.40 The Darling Buds of May **12.45** Heidi **2.50** Wycliffe **3.55** Foyle's War **6.00** Margery and Gladys **8.00** Midsomer Murders **10.00** Law & Order: UK **12.05 Film:** Casablanca (1942) **1.05** FYI Daily **1.10 Film:** Casablanca (1942) **2.05** Margery and Gladys **3.45** May the Best House Win **5.30** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4
11.30 FYI Daily **11.35 Film:** Everything or Nothing: The Untold Story of 007 (2012) **12.15** Storage Wars: Texas **1.15** Storage Wars **1.40** The Big Fish Off **2.45** River Monsters **7.00** Cycling: Vuelta a Espana **8.00** World Series of Darts: Melbourne **11.30 Film:** Life on the Limit (2013) **12.30** FYI Daily **12.35 Film:** Life on the Limit (2013) **1.35** Quincy ME **2.25** Tommy Cooper **2.50** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4
11.00 Made in Chelsea: Ibiza **12.00** The Goldbergs **1.00** The Big Bang Theory **7.00** The Crystal Maze: Celebrity Specials **8.00 Film:** Shallow Hal (2001) **10.15** Don't Tell the Bride **11.20** Tattoo Fixers on Holiday **12.25** Body Fixers **1.30** Gogglebox **2.30** Rude Tube: Superstars of the Web **3.25** Rude Tube **3.50** Hollyoaks

Film4
11.00 Carry On Nurse (1959) **1.00** Antz (1998) **2.40** Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters (2013) **4.45** Multiplicity (1996) **7.00** Patti Cake$ Interview Special **7.05** Hocus Pocus (1993) **9.00** The Drop (2014) **11.10** Splice (2009) **1.15** Isolation (2005) **3.10** Close



FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
The Pirates! In an Adventure with Scientists!, BBC2, 1.30pm
The bungling leader of a band of inept buccaneers is determined to prove his worth to his rivals and win the coveted Pirate of the Year award. Animated comedy, with the voices of Hugh Grant, Martin Freeman, Imelda Staunton and David Tennant. (2012)

TUESDAY
The Odd Life of Timothy Green, BBC2, 1.45pm
A couple bury a box containing their wishes for the perfect child they are unable to have. Soon afterwards, a mysterious boy with leaves growing from his feet shows up on their doorstep, claiming to be their son. Fantasy, with Jennifer Garner and Joel Edgerton. (2012)

WEDNESDAY
Flushed Away, BBC2, 1.35pm
A pampered pet rodent is flushed down a toilet and ends up in a vast underground rat city in the sewers of London. He is befriended by a quick-witted rat who offers to help him find his way home. Animated comedy, with the voices of Hugh Jackman, Kate Winslet, Ian McKellen and Shane Richie. (2006)

Up in the Air, Friday, BBC1, 11.50pm

THURSDAY
Cars 2, BBC2, 1.45pm
Racing car Lightning McQueen heads overseas to compete in an international grand prix, with events in Britain, Japan and Italy. He gets mixed up in international espionage when a case of mistaken identity leads to an encounter with two English spy cars. Pixar animated adventure sequel, with the voices of Owen Wilson and Michael Caine. (2011)

FRIDAY
Up in the Air, BBC1, 11.50pm
A corporate downsizing expert loves his life, detached from everyday existence and striving to achieve a personal goal of 10 million accumulated air miles. However, his lifestyle comes under threat by an up-and-coming executive with a revolutionary approach that would make his role all but obsolete. Comedy drama, starring George Clooney, Vera Farmiga, Anna Kendrick and Jason Bateman (2009)

PICK OF THE WEEK

Rory proves that laughter is the best medicine

If you saw sublime British comedy Man Up the other week on BBC Two, you might have been impressed by the frisson between Simon Pegg and Lake Bell's characters. However, doing a lot of the comedic heavy lifting was Rory Kinnear.

He's also been one of the strongest assets in the Count Arthur Strong BBC series, and as good as Michael Kitchen's Bill Tanner was in a couple of 007 adventures, after the success of recent James Bond offerings and video games, it's hard to imagine anyone else in the role.

Now Rory returns in the second edition of James Wood's period sitcom Quacks, which took a while making the leap from pilot episode to full blown series.

"I did the pilot," explains Rory. "Then it took more than a year before we were all available to get back together, which meant that James had time to work on the scripts and get everything in place. Then we could rehearse a month before we even started filming, which is an unbelievable position to be in."

There have been plenty of medical sitcoms over the years, from the Doctor on the Go series in the 1970s to Surgical Spirit a decade later. However, setting one in the 19th-century is one of the things that inspired Rory to sign up.

"I quite like doing stuff that I haven't necessarily seen before or feels reasonably distinctive, and James is so meticulous and thorough about his research that it's funny to do," he reveals.

With any period sitcom, there are bound to be comparisons with Blackadder, and use the setting as an excuse for slapstick, but Wood has managed to exploit the era itself.

As Rory explains, it was a "period of grim discovery and invention" into techniques that many 21st-century medics will take for granted. "All these people were pioneering new techniques that all of our lives have improved from, but equally there would have been plenty of failures along the way as well."

How does Quacks compare to the other projects he's worked on?

"The sets are quite lavish... Obviously having done Penny Dreadful for Showtime, that's set in a similar-ish time but a bit later. But in terms of sets and costume that have been created with this level of detail, it feels incredibly detailed and lavish."

In this week's offering, Rory is reunited with Spectre co-star Andrew Scott, in the guise of one of Blighty's best loved writers.

When Caroline (Lydia Leonard) lands an invitation to meet her hero, Charles Dickens (Scott), William (Matthew Baynton) finds himself in an awkward position when he exaggerates how much of a fan he is.

Meanwhile, John (Tom Basden) takes an orphan under his wing, and Robert (Kinnear) crosses paths with an uppity young volunteer called Florence Nightingale (Milly Thomas) who starts interfering with his work.

Dr Hendrick (Rupert Everett) is keen to curry favour with the nurse, and her influential family, so Robert has to work out how to get rid of her.

Rory Kinnear, Tom Basden and Mathew Baynton star in Quacks, Tuesday, BBC2, 10pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
Streetmate
Channel 4, 5.30pm
Some readers may remember the 1998 to 2001 show in which Davina McCall played Cupid on the streets of the UK. A sort of Blind Date on the hoof, and like that matchmaking series which was revamped recently, Streetmate has also been given a new lease of life. With Ms McCall busy reuniting relatives on Long Lost Family, presenting duties are now courtesy of Scarlett Moffatt. Stripped across the week, the new series should help boost little Ms Moffatt's fanbase, and prove an engaging way to ease down after a hard day.

Jamie's Quick & Easy Food
Channel 4, 8pm
New series. Jamie Oliver offers viewers the ultimate set of go-to recipes for quick and easy-to-remember cooking having developed a collection of tasty dishes that each use just five ingredients, producing stress-free meals perfect for busy days and for those people who don't have the time or energy to devote to complicated cooking. On the menu in the first edition are seared scallops with black pudding, mashed potatoes and peas, as well as egg and mango chutney flatbreads, rib-eye steak, and an almond pastry puff.

TUESDAY
The Big Family Cooking Showdown
BBC2, 8pm
As Zoe Ball and Nadiya Hussain's culinary competition continues, the Karim family from west London go up against the Dawes from Hampshire. Aunt Zakila is queen of the kitchen in the Karim's household, but will her spice mix leave the judges wanting more when they visit the family at home? Ellie Dawes and her scientist boyfriend Sam share a passion for food, but it remains to be seen whether their bold use of ingredients will be a step too far for judges Rosemary Shrager and Giorgio Locatelli.

WEDNESDAY
Love Your Garden
ITV, 8pm
It's the last in the current series – and to mark the occasion, Alan Titchmarsh and the team are carrying out not one but two makeovers. They're in Nottingham to meet Marcellus Baz, who had something of a misspent youth, getting involved in gangs and pretty crime. However, the discipline of boxing helped to turn his life around, and now, at the age of 41, he's doing the same for troubled teens at his gym. Marcellus would love to turn the dank outside yard into a garden where the kids can learn to grow and cook healthy fruit and vegetables. But what he doesn't know is that as a thank you for all his hard work, Alan and co are planning to give him a new-look garden at home too.

THURSDAY
Who Do You Think You Are?
BBC1, 8pm
TV presenter Fearne Cotton traces her family history, paying particular attention to her great grandfather Evan Meredith. Evan had worked down a coal mine from the age of 13 before training as a chemist, but one part of his life he was unwilling to talk about were his experiences in the First World War. Fearne delves into this period and discovers how he risked his freedom to follow his conscience. Turning to her mother's side of the family, she uncovers an ambitious ancestor.

Who Do You Think You Are?, Thursday, BBC1, 8pm

FRIDAY
The Crystal Maze
Channel 4, 8pm
New series. Richard Ayoade guides members of the Watson family through the Aztec, Medieval, Industrial and Future zones, inviting 22-year-old captain Catriona, her mother Fiona and three others to tackle a range of skill, mystery, physical and mental challenges to win some all-important crystals. The players need secure as many as possible in order to maximise the amount of time they can spend within the legendary Crystal Dome for their final test.

Celebrity Big Brother: Live Final
Channel 5, 9pm
Fifteen famous faces entered the Celebrity Big Brother house 24 days ago, and it wasn't long before some of them began to crack under the pressure. However, the tears and tantrums are almost over for another series as Emma Willis (who will be glad for a break having fronted the regular show over the summer too), whittles the remaining housemates down one by one until the winner is announced. Coleen Nolan defeated Jedward to triumph in the 19th edition of CBB back in January, but who will succeed the singer as the champ tonight and pocket £50,000 for their chosen charity?

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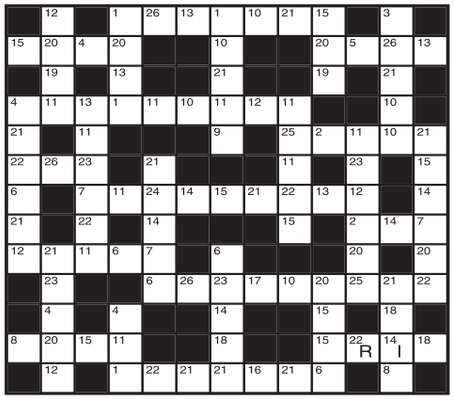
BRAIN GYM

No.443

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



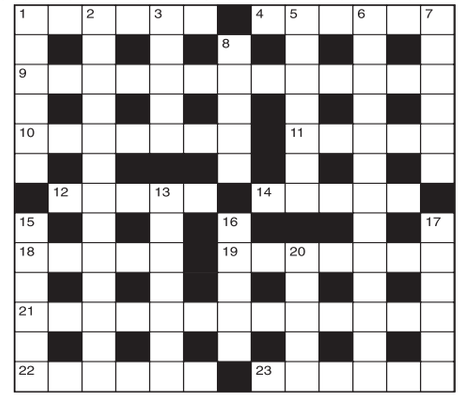
1	14 I
2	15
3	16
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22 R
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Y	U	D	V	F	N	C	K	L	W	G	Q	T
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
E	J	O	P	A	R	B	Z	M	X	H	I	S

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.



Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. They're purely symbolic (6)
4. Free with money (6)
9. Promises, but only donates a single weapon (5,4,4)
10. Assemble for a prayer (7)
11. Of one's birth in S Africa (5)
12. Takes in a form of food (5)
14. It's cut from the wedding cake (5)
18. All right, a sanctimonious creature (5)
19. A political favour? (7)
21. The drink to lay one low? (5-3,5)
22. Untidy arrangement that would horrify Mrs Grundy! (6)
23. Right, put one's pay around making bets (6)

Down

1. What is left (6)
2. One has to be uncommonly rich to do so (4,4,1,4)
3. Directions to prosecute follow (5)
5. The attendant's not responsible for it (7)
6. Only a few words but they may carry conviction (5,8)
7. Posers seldom resolved (6)
8. Complications that naturally go against the grain (5)
13. Small article produced by an erratic knitter? (7)
15. Call around to watch TV (4,2)
16. It has been known to be tickled to death (5)
17. Gets engaged when he is in a bit of trouble (6)
20. Mince pies having a brown colour (5)

Quick Clues:

Across

1. Concealed (6)
4. Mean (6)
9. Unaided (3,4,3,3)
10. United States (7)
11. Weird (5)
12. Jumped (5)
14. Postpone (5)
18. Garret (5)
19. Superintend (7)
21. In a somersault (4,4,5)
22. Scabbard (6)
23. Bomb hole (6)

Down

1. Turkish pipe (6)
2. Discriminate (13)
3. Boredom (5)
5. Not in any place (7)
6. Confusion (13)
7. Tremble (6)
8. Attempt (5)
13. Select (4,3)
15. Sentiment (6)
16. Arbour (5)
17. Hot spring (6)
20. Anaesthetic (5)

Sudoku

1					4		6	
4		7		9				3
	6	8	7		5			4
9						4	1	
					3			
	7	4		5				8
			5		7	8	2	
5				2			4	1
	2	9	1					6

Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

3	8	7	4	6	1	2	5	9
5	6	9	2	3	7	4	1	8
4	1	2	5	9	8	7	6	3
9	4	6	3	2	5	8	7	1
1	5	8	6	7	9	3	4	2
7	2	3	8	1	4	6	9	5
2	7	1	9	4	3	5	8	6
6	9	5	7	8	2	1	3	4
8	3	4	1	5	6	9	2	7

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Desk calendar; 7 Fused; 8 Gusto; 9 Run; 10 Treatment; 11 Breaks; 12 Lay off; 15 Turnstile; 17 Ski; 18 Romeo; 19 Earns; 21 Racketeering.
Down: 1 Distributors; 2 Cos; 3 Ladder; 4 Nightmare; 5 Aisle; 6 Cost of living; 7 Fence; 10 Take stock; 13 Oasis; 14 Direct; 16 Rumba; 20 Rue.
QUICK - Across: 1 Recollection; 7 Cheat; 8 Spine; 9 Pea; 10 Derringer; 11 Relish; 12 Remiss; 15 Tortoises; 17 Aim; 18 Older; 19 Limit; 21 Celebrations.
Down: 1 Recuperation; 2 Lie; 3 Entire; 4 Testiness; 5 Owing; 6 Refreshments; 7 Crawl; 10 Discourse; 13 Inapt; 14 Ostler; 16 Ridge; 20 Mat.

Quiz

1. What is patchouli?
2. What type of bird is a budgerigar?
3. Which Clockwork Orange star kills Captain Kirk in Star Trek: Generations?
4. To which group of islands do North and South Uist belong?
5. Which Italian conductor was appointed music director of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in the 1990s?
6. Who was England's last Plantagenet king?
7. A marimba is a bass variety of which instrument?
8. Which environmental pressure group was founded in the UK in 1969?
9. What is the Australian town Coober Pedy famous for mining?
10. Who succeeded Peter Taylor as permanent manager of Leicester City?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Europe and Asia; 2 Crustacean; 3 Coronation Street; 4 Norman Mailer; 5 Roger Kemble; 6 Mount Kenya; 7 Tony Blair; 8 Irish; 9 Kobe; 10 John Nash.

Niner: SUBLIMATE

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

12767 gives a girl's name,
329784 gives a second girl's name,
9755748 gives a third girl's name.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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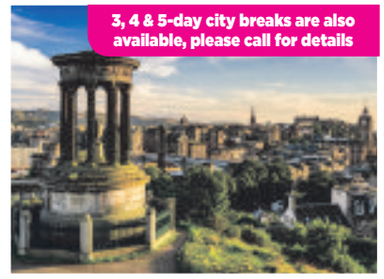
EDINBURGH
CITY BREAK



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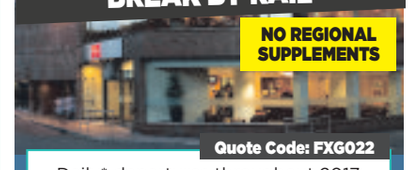
CAPITAL BARGAIN BREAK BY RAIL



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SAT 8.30-16.00
SUN 10.00-16.00

Flavours – fresh out of Thailand

FRESH layout, fresh food and a fresh experience – one word to describe our first ever foray into the wonderful world of Thai food . . . fresh.

Having eaten a friend's Thai cuisine efforts – and very good they were too – to say we had never experienced the delicacy would be overstating the fact.

However, just like you can't beat a curry from your favourite curry house, I'm pretty sure it must be the same for Thai food having enjoyed a wonderful meal at Thai Banana Leaf in Kingswinford.

It was a special occasion, my wife's birthday – and it being on Monday – we decided to go for something a bit more relaxed and this Thai restaurant ticked the box. We were playing a bit of risky game, as our two-year-old daughter was with us. Risky because the restaurant didn't take bookings until 6pm, so it was going to be a fairly late finish. But it was a decision that paid off.

Packed with the flavour – the sea bass dish

Worth a visit – the Thai Banana Leaf

LAYOUT

We were one of two groups eating while we were there – the other being a couple – but the waitress had kindly placed us beside the fish tank, which kept our daughter entertained for ages.

The layout was how you would expect: plenty of neatly-arranged tables, oriental statues and paintings, and of course the fish tank.

We had been told Thai food lives by five fundamental taste senses in each dish – sour, sweet, salty, bitter and spicy – which was like a set of rules sent down from heaven for someone with a palate like mine.

I went for the Fisherman's Soup, a spicy mixed seafood soup with lemongrass, galangal, kaffir lime leaves and mushrooms. Handily, every dish also comes with a 'chilli' chart, which simply meant the more chillis the higher intensity. Kelly went for the deep fried spring roll duck, served with hoi sin sauce. The first thing to mention about that dish was its size. There were four spring rolls when two would probably have sufficed. It was all eaten, but someone with a smaller appetite might want to try something else.

We had asked on arrival about a children's menu and, to be fair, there is the likes of fish fingers on the starter menu which, when ordered with a side order of chips, would make a good alternative.

Annabelle has always been good at experimenting with food so we decided to give one of the main dishes a go and went for the Pud See Eaw, stir fried rice noodles with broccoli, spring green, bean sprouts and egg.

As she loves broccoli and scrambled egg, we thought it was worth a go, especially as it came with a choice of chicken, which we went for, or pork, beef, duck, prawns or a vegetarian option.

It turned out to be a great decision because she really enjoyed the combination and even gave the spring greens and bean sprouts a go.

I decided to stick to the fish theme and the seafood pad prik, stir fried seafood with red curry paste, garlic, pepper, spring onion and coriander with oyster sauce served on sizzling plate, caught my eye, while Kelly went for a whole steamed sea bass with ginger and spring onions in soy sauce.

There was so much to choose from too so, if you're not a massive seafood fan, fear not as sizzling platters, chefs specials, set menus, and noodle and rice dishes are also available.

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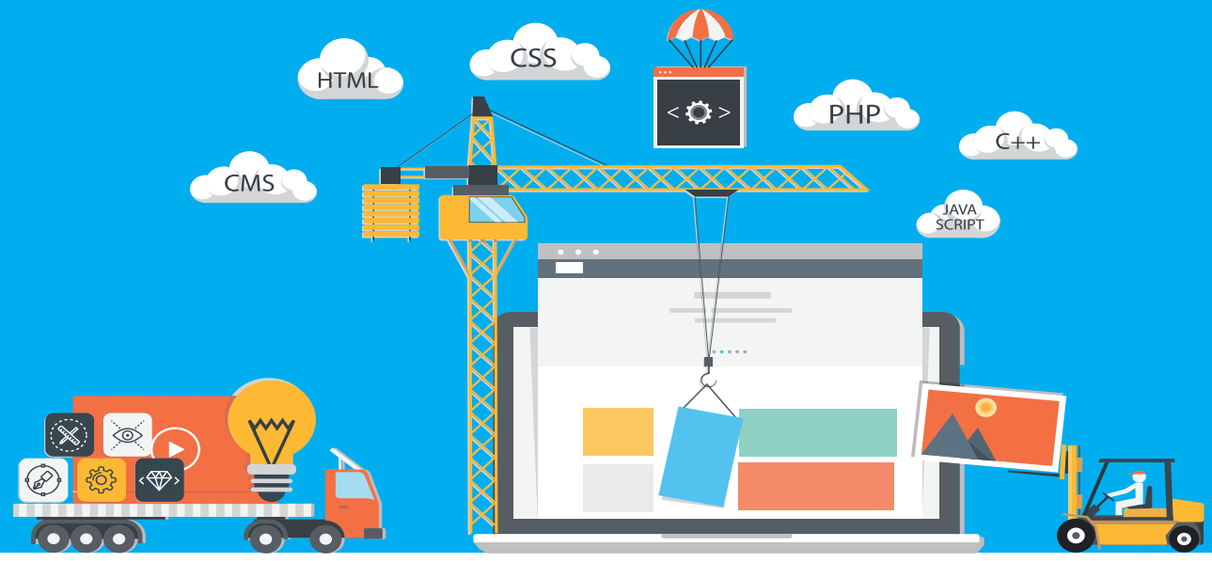

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PROPERTY

YOUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO HOME BUYING AND LETTING

Immaculate home on large plot of popular site

Occupying one of the most sought after and large plots on a popular and now maturing development, 9 Turnberry Road, Bloxwich, Walsall, is for sale through Marrion & Co at £300,000.

With gas central heating and double glazings its accommodation briefly comprises a porch, an entrance hall with stairs off, a re-fitted guest cloakroom/WC, a breakfast kitchen, three good sized reception rooms, a sun lounge extension, four excellent bedrooms, master with built-in furniture and a shower room/en-suite, a ref-fitted family bathroom/WC, a single garage with space to extend, ample driveway parking on a generous secluded plot.

Believed to date from the late 1980s, this immaculately presented and much extended modern freehold detached house was completed to good quality specifications by builders Bovis Homes.

Occupying a secluded yet convenient head of cul-de-sac location on the periphery of this now maturing and evergreen residential development, the house forms part of a small enclave with a block paved road approach. The first floor front windows have views across nearby open farm land, and the rear garden is nice and secluded. There is convenient road, rail and public transport access, with schools catering for children of all age groups and places of public worship. Bloxwich Golf Course is near, as is Junction 10 of the M6 motorway.

In more detail the re-fitted breakfast kitchen is comprehensively equipped and includes a breakfast bar. The spacious rear lounge has a contemporary fire surround with a raised hearth and inset real flame effect gas fire. Double opening multi glazed doors lead to the dining room which in turn her a sliding patio door to the rear garden.

A further pair of multi-glazed double opening doors from the lounge lead to the extended sun lounge.

Upstairs is a large landing area. To the rear is master bedroom one with a partly tiled re-fitted en-suite shower room/WC.

Bedroom two has views over the rear garden and bedroom four faces the front.

Outside is a single garage with potential to extend.

BLOXWICH £300,000

TO VIEW THIS PROPERTY

AGENT: Marrion & Co
TEL: 01922 404446
EMAIL: sales@marrion.co.uk

KEY FEATURES

- 'Bovis' detached home
- 4 bedrooms
- Re-fitted breakfast kitchen
- Re-fitted bathroom & guest WC
- Generous secluded plot

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LOVE YOUR® POSTCODE

Semi-detached is an ideal buy for first-timers

WALSALL
£134,950

Nicely placed on a modern estate, this two-bedroomed semi-detached home in Yorkshire Grove, Walsall, is an ideal first-time buy or an investment property.

It is for sale through loveyourpostcode.com at £134,950. It has a rectangular entrance hall, a downstairs WC, a kitchen/lounge with patio doors to the rear garden and a laundry cupboard.

A staircase from the lounge leads to the first floor.

Upstairs, the master bedroom is double in size. The second bedroom also has space for a double bed with full carpet fitting and a neutral design. The family bathroom has a double shower and WC and a sink. The property has a driveway.

Contact loveyourpostcode.com on 0800 862 0870.

Stunning family home with the 'wow factor'

PELSALL
£289,950 <<<

This stunning family home with the "wow factor" in Daisy Bank Close, Pelsall, Walsall is for sale through Webbs at £289,950.

Being very well presented, the selling agents are urging interested would-be buyers to book a viewing fast!

A deceptively spacious detached family home, it is situated in popular cul de sac location, being close to all local amenities, shops and schools.

Its accommodation briefly comprises a through entrance hallway, a lounge, a re-fitted kitchen/diner, a conservatory, a utility room, three bedrooms, a bathroom and an en-suite to master.

The property is situated on a generous plot with an extensive driveway for several cars and landscaped gardens.

Call 01922 663399.

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8 Lilac Grove, Walsall
2 Bed Semi-Detached House
Guide: £65,000+ (plus fees)

87 Broadway, Walsall
Substantial 3 Bed Detached House
Guide: £250,000+ (plus fees)

42 Belton Avenue, Wednesfield
3 Bed Semi Detached House
Guide: £50,000+ (plus fees)

101 Anson Road, Great Wyrley
2 Bed Mid Terraced House
Guide: £68,000+ (plus fees)

47 Trenchard Avenue, Stafford
3 Bed Semi Detached House
Guide: £75,000 (plus fees)

49 Thetford Road, Great Barr
3 Bed Semi Detached House
Guide: £90,000+ (plus fees)

161 Aston Road, Willenhall
2 Bed Detached Bungalow
Guide: £50,000+ (plus fees)

20 Packwood Close, Handsworth Wood
1 Bed Mid Terraced House
Guide: £60,000+ (plus fees)

13 Wilkinson Road, Moxley
3 Bed Semi-Detached House
Guide: £68,000-£73,000 (plus fees)

18 Dunster, Tamworth
Substantial 5 Bed Detached House
Guide: £365,000-£385,000 (plus fees)

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Semi-detached close to local amenities

WALSALL
£155,000

An immaculately maintained semi-detached house in a quiet cul-de-sac location in Dalton Road, Walsall, lies close to local amenities.

It is for sale through Marrion & Co at £155,000.

With double glazing and gas central heating, the deceptively spacious accommodation briefly comprises of an entrance hall/stairs, a rear lounge/diner, a front breakfast/kitchen, three bedrooms, a bathroom/WC, garage and driveway and it has a private rear garden.

A spokesman for the selling agents said: "This immaculately presented and extended three-bedroomed semi-detached home has been lovingly maintained for many years by the current owners and is most worthy of early internal inspection."

The house is situated in a quiet cul-de-sac location in an established and popular residential locality

having all usual local amenities including Town Centres shops and services within easy access.

These include frequent and regular public transport services, schools catering for children of all age groups and places of public worship. Nearby Junction 10 of the M6 Motorway also affords easy commuting to Birmingham City Centre and access to the wider West Midland conurbation. An excellent range of recreational and social facilities in the Walsall area complete this attractive and well planned family home.

The selling agents are expecting the sale of this home to generate a lot of interest.

For further information, or to book that all important viewing, contact Marrion & Co on 01922 404446 or visit www.marrion.co.uk

Beautiful semi-detached family home available to rent

WALSALL
£765 PCM >>>

This beautiful three-bedroomed semi-detached family home in Sutton Road, Walsall is available for working professionals to rent with at £765 per calender month, with a minimum term of 12 months, through loveyourpostcode.com

The home has been tastefully decorated and finished to a good standard with outstanding features including spacious lounge, good sized bedrooms, large kitchen and landscaped garden to the front and rear.

In full it has two reception rooms, a kitchen, landing, three bedrooms and a bathroom. The garages are not available for use.

For further information, or to book that all important viewing to see if this is the ideal next home for you, please contact the selling agents, loveyourpostcode.com on their telephone number 0800 862 0870.

Traditional semi-detached home on sale with no chain

WALSALL WOOD
£159,950 <<<

For sale with no chain, this traditional three-bedroomed semi-detached property in Hall Lane, Walsall Wood lies in a desirable area overlooking open fields.

It is being marketed by selling agents, Goodchilds, at £159,950 with no chain.

This three-bedroomed family home has accommodation briefly comprising of an entrance hall, a lounge/diner, a modern fitted kitchen, three good sized bedrooms and a modern family bathroom with separate shower cubicle.

To the outside is a driveway, a single garage and a private rear garden.

The property is located in a popular road in Walsall Wood overlooking open fields and being within easy access of several reputable schools.

For further information contact Goodchilds on 01543 226 655.

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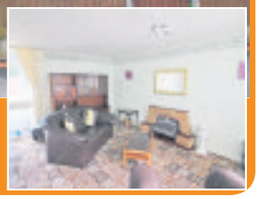
Church Street, Bloxwich Walsall
Auction Guide Price £100,000

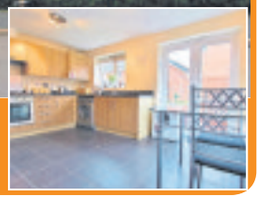
NEW



1	3
1	EPC TBC

Stamping Way, Bloxwich Walsall
£195,000

NEW



2	3
2	EPC C

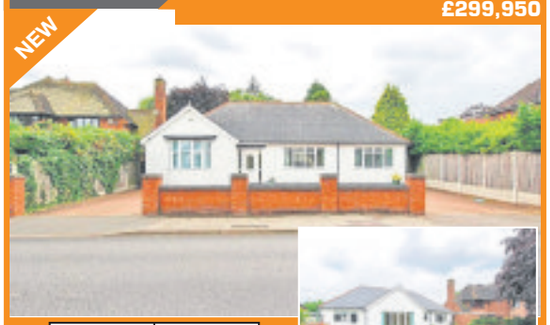
Victoria Avenue, Bloxwich Walsall
Offers in the Region Of £274,950

NEW

3	4
2	EPC E

Sanstone Road, Bloxwich Walsall
£299,950

NEW

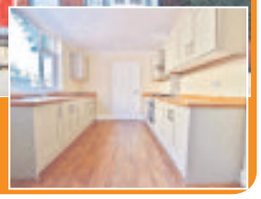


2	3
1	EPC C

Bamford Road, Bloxwich Walsall
Offers in the Region Of £255,000

2	3
1	EPC D

Borneo Street, Walsall
Offers in the Region Of £179,950



2	3
1	EPC F

Walker Road, Walsall
Guide £85,000

1	3
1	EPC D

Sanstone Road, Bloxwich Walsall
£269,950

2	2
1	EPC D

Bloxwich Road, Leamore Walsall
£89,950 Offers

2	2
1	EPC E

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Paul Marrion - Partner

Kathy Marrion - Partner

www.marrion.co.uk

Energy Rating - D NEW

Vicarage Road
Wednesfield
- Detached bungalow
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, kitchen
- 3 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Garage, drive, gardens
- NO ONWARD CHAIN

£200,000

Energy Rating - TBC NEW

Lane Avenue
Walsall
- Well Presented End Terraced House
- PVCu Double Glazing
- Gas Central Heating
- Front Lounge, Rear Kitchen
- Three Bedrooms,
- Driveway, Front & Rear Gardens
- Potential to Extend
- No Onward Chain

£129,950

Energy Rating - C NEW

Newhome Way
Walsall
- Well Presented modern
- Town House
- Three Bedrooms
- Lounge, Conservatory
- En-suite to Master Bedroom
- Family Bathroom
- No Onward Chain
- Must Be Viewed

£140,000

Energy Rating - D NEW

Lancaster Place
Bloxwich
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- lounge, kitchen/diner
- 3 bedrooms
- bathroom
- separate WC
- Garden
- Garage/parking

£125,000

Energy Rating - B NEW

Woodcroft Cout
Walsall
- A well presented 1st floor apartment
- Secure allocated parking
- Gas centrally heated & PVCu double glazed
- Spacious lounge/ diner
- Fitted Kitchen
- Two bedrooms
- Bathroom/WC
- No Onward Chain

£79,950

Energy Rating - D NEW

Chillenden Court, Mill Street
Willenhall
- Second Floor Flat
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Kitchen, lounge/ Diner
- One bedroom
- Bathroom/WC
- Communal gardens
- Communal Off Road Parking, No Onward Chain

£65,000

Energy Rating - TBC NEW

Church Street
Bloxwich
- End town house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, dining kitchen
- 3 bedrooms
- Gardens and parking
- NO ONWARD CHAIN
- Bathroom/WC

£129,950

Energy Rating - TBC NEW

Sandringham Avenue
Willenhall
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Two Reception Rooms
- Fitted Breakfast Kitchen
- 3 bedrooms,
- Shower Room/WC
- Driveway and Rear Garden

£174,950

Energy Rating - F

Bloxwich Road
Leamore
- Mid terrace house
- PVCu double glazed
- 2 reception rooms
- kitchen
- 2 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Garden
- NO ONWARD CHAIN

£80,000

Energy Rating - D

Lancaster Place
Walsall
- NO ONWARD CHAIN
- spacious semi detached gas centrally heated, PVC
- PVCu Double Glazed Storm Porch
- Rear Lounge, Fitted Kitchen
- Downstairs Shower Room
- 2 Double Bedrooms
- Refitted Bathroom/WC Well
- Maintained Enclosed Rear

£125,000

Energy Rating - C

Oak Crescent, Leamore
Walsall
- Semi-Detached House
- PVCu double glazing
- Gas Central Heating
- Lounge. Breakfast Kitchen
- 2 Bedrooms, Large Bathroom
- Driveway
- No Onward Chain
- Rear Garden

£92,950

Energy Rating - C

Brookhill Close
Willenhall
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, dining kitchen
- 2 bedrooms
- bathroom WC
- Parking and gardens
- NO ONWARD CHAIN

£105,000

Energy Rating - D

Lancaster Place, Bloxwich
Walsall
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge/Diner,
- Fitted kitchen,
- 2 Double Bedrooms, bathroom/WC,
- Driveway
- Rear Garden.

£110,000

Energy Rating - C

Stanley Road
West Midlands
- Semi detached house
- PVCu double glazed
- Gas centrally heated
- Lounge/diner, kitchen
- 2 bedrooms, bathroom/WC
- Garage, driveway, garden
- NO ONWARD CHAIN
- Garden

£120,000

Energy Rating - B

Havergal Place
Shareshill
- Ground floor apartment
- Gas centrally heated
- Double glazed
- Lounge, kitchen
- 2 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Garage and parking
- NO ONWARD CHAIN

£144,950

Energy Rating - C

Stamping Way
Bloxwich
- Three storey detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, kitchen, dining room
- 3 bedrooms, bathroom/WC
- Garage, parking
- Gardens
- Must Be Viewed

£195,000

Energy Rating - D

The Oaks
Bloxwich
- Detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, kitchen
- 4 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Garage, parking
- gardens

£199,950

Energy Rating - D

Highgrove Close
Willenhall
- Link detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, dining room
- conservatory, kitchen
- utility, 3 bedrooms bathroom/WC
- Garage, driveway
- Gardens

£220,000

Energy Rating - E

Lichfield Road
Rushall
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- Majority PVCu double glazed
- 3 reception rooms, kitchen
- 4 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Driveway and gardens
- NO ONWARD CHAIN

£225,000

Energy Rating - D

Westminster Road
Rushall
- Detached bungalow
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Lounge, kitchen
- dining room (alternative bedroom 4)
- 3/4 Bedrooms
- bathroom/WC, Garage
- driveway gardens

£259,950

Energy Rating - D

Long Lane
Wolverhampton
- Detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- 2 reception rooms, kitchen
- 4 bedrooms, bathroom/WC
- Driveway, gardens
- Recently refurbished
- No Onward Chain

£299,950

Energy Rating - D

Turnberry Road
Bloxwich
- Detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- PVCu double glazed
- Kitchen, 3 reception rooms
- 4 bedrooms
- bathroom/WC
- Garage, driveway
- gardens

£300,000

Energy Rating - E

Lichfield Road
Bloxwich
- Semi detached house
- Gas centrally heated
- Double glazed
- 2 reception rooms, breakfast room, conservatory, utility
- 3 bedroom on first floor, bathroom/WC
- 3 bedrooms on second floor
- Ample parking, garden, separate garage
- 1/3 acre garden plot

£349,950

Energy Rating - B

Stafford Road
Bloxwich
- Extended Detached Family Home
- Two Reception Rooms
- Fitted Breakfast Kitchen
- Cloakroom, Conservatory
- Six Bedrooms, Three En-suites
- Family Bathroom, Large Driveway
- Rear Garden
- No Onward Chain

£450,000

Energy Rating - D

Paddock Gardens
Walsall
- Modern Detached Family Home
- Three Reception Rooms, Kitchen
- Family Bathroom
- En-Suite
- 5 Bedrooms
- Double Garage
- Driveway
- Large Rear Garden

£600,000

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REDUCED

BLOXWICH
DOWNFIELD CLOSE

- Detached Family Home
- Sought After Location
- Hallway, Lounge
- Dining Room,
- Conservatory
- Refitted Kitchen, WC
- 4 Bedrooms
- Refitted Bathroom
- Driveway

£260,000

NEW

ESSINGTON
THE OLDE SHOP

- Extended Cottage
- Sought After Location
- Stunning Kitchen
- Lounge WC
- Dining Roomr room and outstanding
- spacious en suite. Externally there a
- 3 Bedrooms over 2 Floors
- Double Garage
- Landscaped Gardens
- Internal Viewing Essential

£270,000

NEW

BLOXWICH
VICTORIA AVENUE

- Family Detached Home
- Guests WC
- Lounge
- Refitted Kitchen/Diner
- 4 Double Bedrooms
- En-Suite
- Bathroom
- Rear Garden
- Garage. Driveway

£260,000

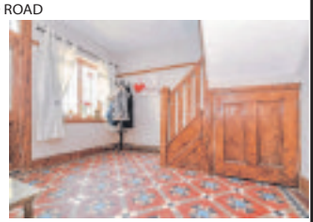
WALSALL
CROXDENE AVENUE

- Mid Town House
- Lounge
- Kitchen
- 3 Bedrooms
- Shower Room
- Rear Garden
- NO CHAIN

Auction Guide £90,000

NEW

BLOXWICH
FIELD ROAD

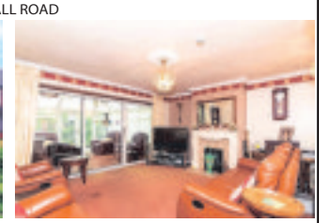


- Outstanding Family Home
- Porch, Generous Hallway
- Lounge, Sitting Room
- Kitchen, Dining Room
- Bathroom
- 3 Double Bedrooms
- Refitted Bathroom
- Driveway, Garage
- Viewing Recommended

£219,950

NEW

WALSALL
PELSALL ROAD



- GENEROUS DETACHED FAMIY HOME
- Entrance Porch,
- Through Hallway,
- Lounge, Dining Room, kitchen,
- Utility Room, Shower Room,
- Sitting Room/Bedroom Four
- Conservatory.
- 1t Floor 3 Double Bedrooms,
- Family Bathroom, 2 en-suites.
- Landscaped Gardens, Garage

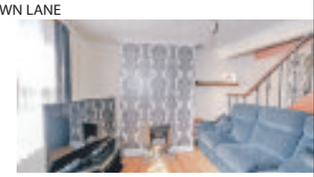
£299,950

LEAMORE
BLOXWICH ROAD

- Tradional Semi
- Lounge/Diner
- Ground Floor Wet Room
- Kitchen/Diner
- Family Bathroom
- Garage/Workshop
- Rear Garden
- Driveway

£160,000

PELSALL
OLD TOWN LANE



- Traditional Family Home
- Lounge/diner, Kitchen
- Bathroom
- 2 Double Bedrooms
- Gardens

£120,000

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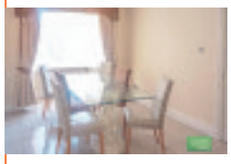

Vernon Way, Walsall

- Two/Three Bedroom Detached Bungalow
- Two Reception Rooms
- Fitted Kitchen
- En-Suite Shower Room
- Ample Off Road Parking
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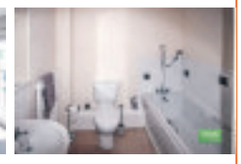

Squires Grove, Willenhall

- Two Bedroom Apartment
- Lounge with Double Doors
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- Allocated Parking
- Sorry No DHSS
- Rating:67

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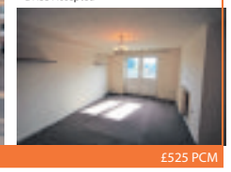
- Rating:80
- DHSS Accepted



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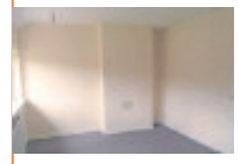

Leamore Lane, Bloxwich

- Two Bedroom End of Terrace
- Entrance Hallway
- Lounge
- Fitted Kitchen
- Conservatory
- Front and Rear Gardens
- Separate Garage
- Gas Central Heating
- Rating:78
- DHSS Accepted

£525 PCM

Pendlebury Close, Walsall

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- Lounge with French Doors
- Kitchen with Appliances
- Bathroom & Ensuite
- Sorry No DHSS, Pets or Smokers
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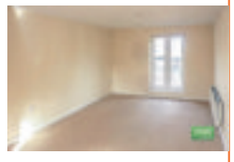

Walker Road, Walsall

- Two Bedroom Ground Floor Apartment
- Open Plan Lounge
- Fitted Kitchen
- Open Plan Lounge
- Family Bathroom
- Entrance Hallway with Storage
- Double Glazing, Gas Central Heating
- Allocated Parking
- Rating:87
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- Bathroom with Shower Over Bath
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- DHSS Accepted

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- Rating: 69
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- Private Entrance
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Marton Court, High street

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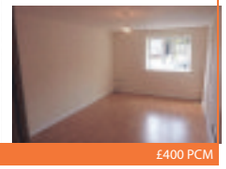
- Fitted Kitchen
- Communal Grounds
- Rating-68



£400 PCM

Harrison Street, Bloxwich

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- One Bedroom
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- Rating:7
- DHSS Accepted

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Major cleaning operation switches fleet to Škoda Fabias

Skoda proves a sweeping success with Molly Maid

By Anthony Martyn

Škoda UK has won a sparkling new contract with the domestic cleaning franchise, Molly Maid, to supply an additional 15 Fabia S 1.0 Hatch models to its UK fleet and a further 60 in the next year.

Established 33 years ago, Molly Maid's UK wide cleaning operation utilises 370 cars across its fleet to carry out over 300,000 cleans every year. 30 Škoda Fabias have already been added to the fleet with 15 new vehicles currently on order, and plans to increase numbers further by replacing existing Nissan, Toyota and Vauxhall models following the end of vehicle cycles.

The UK's number one domestic cleaning company relies on its vehicles to provide an efficient service to customers and reflect the professional image of the business.

The Fabia's sleek design and award-winning practicality and performance complimented the cleaning firm's requirements perfectly.

The Fabia was chosen thanks to its fantastic value for money, with low p11d value and highly competitive

Jonathan Holden, chief operating officer of Molly Maid

lease cost compared to competitors. Plus, the BIK rate was a desirable factor to keep overall running costs low for drivers. The Fabia also offers a sizeable 330-litre boot (seats up, 1,150 litres with the rear bench folded), which is ideal to carry bulky cleaning equipment.

The resilience, efficiency and coverage of the Škoda retailer network was essential to securing the deal. With a high annual turnover of vehicles, the ability to deliver new models quickly to staff nationwide is vital to ensure excellent customer service is maintained.

Jonathan Holden, chief operating officer of Molly Maid, commented on the new deal: "The Škoda Fabia fitted the bill completely for us, right down to the fundamentals of cost – not just for the business but our drivers – practicality and overall design.

"Image matters in this arena, and that was a huge consideration, as each car is required to be in the Molly Maid navy blue with our specially designed livery, to act as a roaming billboard for the company.

"We made the move to Škoda, as previous manufacturers couldn't offer the same combination of benefits as the Fabia.

"We also need a rapid response from a dealer network to both supply and service vehicles to save on costly downtime and Škoda has proven time and time again to deliver on all fronts."

Henry Williams, head of fleet at Škoda UK, added: "We are delighted to be working with Molly Maid, they have a huge network of drivers across the UK who mainly drive in towns and cities, therefore the compact Fabia was the ideal choice.

"The five door S model offers a deceptively sizable boot and the vehicle's fuel efficiency and running costs ensure that it is economical for business as well.

"We look forward to building on our relationship with Molly Maid in the coming years."

The ŠkodaFabia is a modern small car available in four trim levels: S, SE, SEL and Monte Carlo with prices starting from just £11,100.

The Fabia utilises the crystalline shape and sharp lines of the Škoda design language and incorporates the brand's fundamental values of providing space, comfort and functionality.

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10 Personals

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Gareth Barry with students at Ellesmere College, where he is patron and where son Oscar attends

Barry in action for Everton against his former team Villa, where the ex-skipper remains a firm favourite

Barry first played for Villa in 1998 and made 441 appearances

Gareth Barry gets involved with Chelsea's Diego Costa

Every game counts as Barry closes on record

MAY 2, 1998 – an otherwise insignificant date but for the fact that this was the day a certain Gareth Barry made his Premier League debut.

Few could have ever envisaged that, almost two decades later, that fresh-faced youngster who had arrived from the south coast would be on his way to setting the all-time Premier League appearance record.

Barry's move to Villa Park from Brighton, when he was just 16, was controversial enough.

He arrived with Michael Standing – a fellow midfielder who played zero first-team minutes in four years before leaving for Bradford.

Barry's debut against Sheffield Wednesday, however, was glimpse of things to come.

On that day he featured alongside current England boss Gareth Southgate and the late Ugo Ehiogu in a defensive trio under then boss John Gregory.

There were little doubts over his level of talentand a decade later, in 2008, he was a proud captain at Villa Park.

Chalked

An adopted Brummie, Barry was the key cog in Martin O'Neill's eye-catching outfit which pushed the 'established' top four so hard in the mid-noughties.

Barry had chalked up 441 appearances in claret and blue before he moved north to Manchester City, claiming a "new challenge" was required. Within a few years he was an FA Cup winner and Premier League champion.

But the most prized of all could be yet to come.

For that Villa status is one thing, and winners medals are another, but Barry, now 36, is not far from etching himself into English top flight history.

Now with Everton (but coveted by Tony Pulis at Albion), Barry has another year on his deal at Goodison Park and is set for a huge individual milestone.

Ryan Giggs' Premier League appearance record stands at 632, Barry is just four behind on 628.

He can't hide from the scale of the honour.

"I do like stats. I'd be lying if I was saying I don't look out for them," said the former Villa skipper.

"That record's been spoken about more the closer I get now. Obviously it's not the same now being 36 as when you are 26 but in terms of being able to do a job I'm still feeling really strong and still enjoying it.

"Enjoying it is more important than anything and at the minute I've got a great manager that understands my age and what I can and can't do.

"If I don't play any more Premier League games I'd be immensely proud of how many I've done and what I've achieved.

"If I do break it then my name's on top of the pile and my parents will probably be extra proud. We'll see what happens."

Barry, who is now based in Cheshire, has recently been made a patron of Shropshire's Ellesmere College's football academy, where his son Oscar attends.

And there remains a sparkle in his eye when discussing Villa.

He points to the length of time spent at Villa Park and at Bodymoor Heath, where he developed from a boy into a man – from spindly academy hopeful to worshipped first-team skipper.

"I look out for Villa's results all of the time," he added. "The majority of my friends are from Birmingham, supporting either Villa or Blues. There are so many memories at Villa for me.

"Because I've been gone so long people forget how many games I did actually play – it's a time I'll never forget, they brought me into Premier League life.

"My game improved when I left school and went to Villa. The coaches, youth team, reserve team and to the first team, they were fantastic with me.

"Any supporter will tell you that they like young players coming through. If a player attached to an academy can eventually go through to being captain and wear that armband, it's fantastic for them. I was lucky enough to do it at Villa and really enjoyed it. They taught me how to become a professional footballer and what's needed. It's a time I'll never forget."

The Villa Barry left in 2009 are a long way from the club's current plight. Steve Bruce knows the importance of his first full season at the helm. Barry believes his former side are in the right hands.

"It's good to see Steve Bruce there, he had a little sticky patch but he's a fantastic manager.

"I think Villa are finding their feet again. It's been a few tough years with the relegation, which was always going to be hard, but they just needed that bit of time to settle and Steve Bruce is the right man to do that.

"He'll get a squad that'll eventually start to find their feet and begin to push for promotion."

Faithful

A quick search of Barry's name on internet forums or social media will instantly display a plethora of nostalgic Villa Park faithful yearning for a Barry return.

Earlier this year he attended the Stiliyan Petrov Foundation dinner, where a photo was snapped for a smartly-dressed Barry posing with Villa's current midfield prodigy Jack Grealish. The Solihull-born 21-year-old has a long, long way to go eclipsing the sort of reputation Villa's former No.6 built.

He'll be 37 by next summer, at the end of his Everton contract and with – presumably – the Premier League record safely under his belt.

A Villa return couldn't happen...could it?

"You never say never but as always Everton is the sole focus for me at the moment."

And what will come after the boots are hung up? "I'm not ruling anything out, I'm not going to do the badges while I'm still playing. I've made that decision.

"I want to finish playing and look back and see if I do miss being around it and whether I want to go into coaching. I'm not one to plan too much so I'll go from there.

"I've got one more left which will take me till I'm 37 which, for a footballer, is veteran stages – so I realise where I am in my career. I'm enjoying it still and that's the most important thing."

SPORTING FEATURE

By Lewis Cox

"If I don't play any more Premier League games I'd be immensely proud of how what I've achieved."

Wolves old boy in £18m Hornets move

FORMER Wolves player Andre Gray has become the most expensive Black Country footballer in history in an £18 million deal from Burnley to Premiership rivals Watford.

Wednesfield-born Gray, 26, scored nine times in the Premier League last year. Formerly on the youth books at Wolves, he was released by the club at the age of 13.

Gray becomes the most expensive footballer from the area, more than double the £8.5 million paid for Stan Collymore by Liverpool.

The striker was knifed in a gang fight over Christmas in 2011. In 20012 Gray was suspended for four matches and fined £25,000 over homophobic Tweets he had posted.

Gray, who progressed through Shrewsbury's youth system, joined Luton in 2012 and made more than 100 appearances before moving on for an undisclosed fee in 2014 to Brentford, for whom he scored 20 goals in 52 games. He had a loan spell at Telford in 2009-10.

Golfers tee up chance to play at The Belfry

GOLFERS from The Chase and Penn clubs have teed up a round at the Ryder Cup course The Belfry for the national final of the American Golf 9 Hole Individual Championship.

Home golfer Paul Elsey held off Laurence Horan by a point in the regional qualifying held at Penn Golf Club.

They now join qualifiers from all over the UK and Ireland in front of Sky Sports' cameras for the grand final on September 7 and 8. They are both also in contention for the Tournament of Champions in Mauritius.

"Our 9 Hole Championship is hugely popular," said Daniel Gathercole, director of marketing and communication at American Golf. "It gives golfers the chance to play championship golf after work and still be home at a reasonable time.

"Golf has struggled to find a place in people's busy lives over recent years so we're delighted that events such as the 9 Hole Championship have proved so popular."

Hawks take flight for national T20 final

C&R Hawks are gearing up for the biggest game in their short history after reaching the finals day of the ECB National T20 tournament.

The Birmingham League Division Two outfit beat Essex League side Wanstead and Snaresbrook at Walsall CC's Gorway ground to reach the showpiece final at Derbys 3aaa ground, home to Derbyshire County Cricket Club. Highlights of the September 11 clash will be broadcast on Sky Sports.

Skipper Mubeen Rashid said: "This is already the furthest any Birmingham League club has ever got in the competition and that is something we are very proud of."

Hawks only formed in 2014 by the merger of Hawkins Sports and Cannock and Rugeley. But they have some serious talent in their ranks, including Omar Ali, the younger brother of England star Moeen. Kabir Ali, Moeen's cousin, played 14 one-day internationals himself between 2003 and 2006 and though now aged 36 has proved a threat with both bat and ball as Hawks battled their way into the later stages of the tournament.

Sport

Ex-Villa ace Barry closing in on appearance record

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Wolves keep their rivals in drop danger

WALSALL'S defeat to rivals Wolverhampton kept them in relegation trouble towards the foot of the Birmingham & District League Premier Division.

Danny Cox top scored for Walsall with 57 but a total of 157 all out never looked likely to trouble the hosts. Matthew Kleinveldt took 5-32 for Wolverhampton then hit 47.

Kidderminster failed to make up much ground, despite Craig Wood hitting 12 boundaries in an undefeated innings of 131 against Ombersley, who won the Worcestershire derby by four wickets with three balls remaining. Replying to Kidderminster's 215-9 from 55 overs, an unbeaten 93 from Uday Kaul saw Ombersley to victory.

West Bromwich Dartmouth lost at home to Dorridge, Kadeer Ali taking 5-64 in the visitors' 222-9.

Ali also proved to be Dartmouth's best batsman, hitting 98 from 173 balls but he was, eventually, last man out at 182.

Nipun Karunanayake scored 101 in Himley's losing draw against Bromsgrove in Division One, while Smethwick kept up the pressure on leaders Moseley with victory over Tamworth.

In Division Two, Cannock & Rugeley Hawks (Johar Ahmed 5-40) beat Fordhouses by three wickets and Wombourne (Adam Quiney 6-57) overcame Sutton Coldfield, but there were defeats for Halesowen, Old Hill and Penkridge.

Steve Hinton took 7-37 as Streetly went top of Division Three with victory over Brewood, two points clear of Lichfield – who won at Sentinel.

Big-hitting Pelsall on receiving end in Penn demolition

THERE was a shock in the Staffs Clubs Premier Division as big-hitting leaders Pelsall fell to a seven-wicket defeat after being dismissed for just 87.

Imran Jamshed and Tom Nutting did the damage for Penn, taking four wickets each. Tom Boyd (25) top scored for Pelsall. Sandeep Dhillon scored 31 in Penn's reply.

Aldridge captain Daniel Shortland scored 78 and Nasir Ali khan 58, but both were outshone by Rugeley's Nathan Timbrell who ended 120 not out of his side's 280-5. Jake Aston also took 3-49 as Aldridge were bowled out for 234, some 46 runs short.

Yasir Mohammad hit 51 for Walsall YPF and Ghulam Abbas 47 in a total of 159, but Cannock came away with a six-wicket win, posting 163-4, Adam Baker with 76.

Daniel Wilks powered Whittington to a nine-wicket win over Wednesbury. Number eight Ranvir Singh (85 not out) had top scored for Wednesbury in their 209-8, but was upstaged by Wilks who hit 118 in 72 balls with 14 fours and seven sixes in a total of 210-1.

Wyrley Juniors picks up top award

Keith Hardy with Martin Keown

WYRLEY Juniors FC have added the Charter Standard Community Club of the Year award to their list of accolades.

Club volunteers attended the 2017 FA Community Awards national ceremony at Wembley Stadium, presented by McDonald's, ahead of the Community Shield tie between Arsenal and Chelsea. Wyrley Juniors chairman Keith Hardy was handed the award by former England defender Martin Keown, McDonald's Head of Football.

The FA and McDonald's Community Awards, now in their eighth year, recognise and celebrate volunteers, coaches, clubs and leagues throughout England whose dedication and hard work ensures the ongoing success of grassroots football in local communities. This year, the FA and McDonald's received more than 2,400 nominations to the FA Community Awards.

Wyrley Juniors FC has seen a remarkable growth over the past two years rising, from 48 members to 65, including two new disability teams and a new walking football side. It's also the first club in the region with a ladies veterans team.

SADDLERS' BIG TURNAROUND

NEW boy Shaun Donnellan reflected on a 'crazy' few days after a whirlwind 24 hours that saw him help Walsall earn their first win of the season.

The 20-year-old was snapped up by the Saddlers on a six-month loan from Albion before being thrown straight into the side for the visit of Oldham.

A devastating second half display saw Jon Whitney's side secure a 2-1 victory over the Latics – their first win of the 2017/18 campaign.

"It was a crazy 24 hours," Donnellan said. "I only trained with the boys for about 45 minutes – we did a bit of shape work. But I didn't even know everyone's name.

After a frustrating first-half, in which Oldham took the lead through Ryan McLaughlin, Walsall secured all three points thanks to goals from Joe Edwards and Erhun Oztumer.

And Donnellan revealed it was strong words from boss Whitney that inspired the come-back and improved second-half display.

"The gaffer told us some home truths at half-time," the youngster continued.

Oldham's 4-3-3 formation saw midfielders Ousmane Fane, Mason Fawns and Ollie Banks sit in front of the back four. And, quite simply, the Saddlers struggled to find the width needed to break them down. With that solid defensive base, John Sheridan's side pinched a half-time lead when McLaughlin's ball into the box bamboozled everyone and somehow found its way into the back of the net.

Such was the home crowd's disappointment, Walsall's players made their way off at the break to a chorus of boos. But Whitney told his players to go out, believe in their ability and express themselves. And a transformed side re-emerged.

The relief was there for all to see with Whitney running on to the pitch and physio Marc Czuczman falling to his knees. And it meant – at the final whistle – Walsall's players were treated to rapturous applause.

Erhun Oztumer scores Walsall's dramatic late winning goal against Oldham on Saturday

Boss Thomas suffers defeat on his debut

WAYNE Thomas suffered defeat in his first defeat as Rushall Olympic manager, falling to a 2-0 defeat at the hands of Warrington Town in Evo-Stik Premier.

Warrington took the lead with a well-placed half-volley from Connor Hughes on 17 minutes after a deep cross from the right wing. Stan Mugisha twice went close with efforts inside the Warrington box towards the end of the half. The Pics' No.7 might also have had a penalty on the stroke of half-time after being bundled over by a combination of two home defenders.

The second half started quietly, with just a long-range effort from Liam Lawrence and a couple of set-pieces.

Rushall thought they had been given the opportunity to equalise from the spot on 84 minutes but referee Daniel Hitchell waved away the Pics' protests after the assistant referee appeared to signal a penalty for a handball by Warrington defender Sean Williams. Joe Mwasile put the game to bed in the dying seconds.

Comfortable win, finally, for Darlaston

Darlaston Town (1874) 4 St Martins 2

FOR the second successive League game a home crowd exceeding 100 witnessed Darlaston make it six points from two games with a comfortable win against Oswestry-based St Martins FC.

The pace of Sam Giles and Daryl Westwood caused the visitors difficulties, but despite relentless pressure, the half ended goalless. Disaster struck in the opening minute when the visitors took the lead through Zak Ward.

The home side responded magnificently and equalised from the penalty spot on 48 minutes.

As the home side's pressure mounted they were rewarded with the best goal of the game on 64 minutes. Westwood and Hughes combined superbly down the left, Hughes cutting in from the left beating two defenders before unselfishly laying the ball back for the oncoming Ricky Kelly to drive the ball home.

Ten minutes later the home side extended their lead when Westwood set up substitute Scott Broadway to open his goalscoring account.

The visitors responded well and set up a nail biting final 13 minutes when Ward netted his second goal with a looping header from a Howes free kick. However Darlaston were not to be denied and settled the game nine minutes from time when Luke Charlton rose to glance home a 10 yard header.

This Saturday Darlaston are in home action against local rivals Willenhall Town. Kick off is at 3pm.

Front two cause Stone problems

Stone OA 0 Wolves Sporting CFC 3

SPORTING started brightly and the pace of front two pairing Dimitri Dunkley and new signing Tom Hill were causing Stone problems.

It was no surprise when on 29 minutes full back Curtis Ellis whipped in a superb cross and Hill opened the scoring with a bullet header.

They got their second on 75 minutes, with Dunkley on the end of a one-two with sub Habbershaw and they linked up again for his second on 84 minutes. After two away games Sporting play high flying Shifnal Town on Saturday at Great Wyrley's Pride Park.

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